

DUŠAN ZBAVITEL
BENGALI LITERATURE

A HISTORY OF INDIAN LITERATURE

EDITED BY JAN GONDA

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OTTO HARRASSOWITZ · WIESBADEN

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Dušan Zbavitel

BENGALI LITERATURE

AN INTRODUCTORY NOTE

Some readers may be surprised by the different spelling of some personal names which they are used to meet in Anglicized forms, such as *Ṭhākur* instead of Tagore, *Caṭṭopādhyāy* instead of Chatterjee etc. For reasons of consistency, we have used a single method of transliterating all Bengali names and words throughout the book, which is generally used in publications of this kind; the only exceptions being the use of *z* instead of *j* in certain Muslim names (*Nazrul*, *Kāzī* etc.) and *w* instead of *oy*, in similar cases (e.g. *Wāliullāh*). Names in Anglicized forms are, however, to be found in the Index.

INTRODUCTION

A survey of the thousand-years' development of Bengali literature¹ shows that this long space of time is divided into three periods, not only distinctly separated from each other by "dark periods," but also closed each in itself, with almost no direct continuation in the following period which in each case is characterized by features different from the basic traits of the preceding phase. The first is the period of the *caryās*, covering approximately the first and the second centuries of our millennium. The second, starting after a gap of almost two centuries, includes all mediaeval or classical Bengali poetry, till the 18th century, and is again followed by a period of decay, shorter this time, but no less distinctive. At the beginning of the 19th century, the period of modern literature starts, different in all aspects from the classical Bengali literature.

¹ General information: R. CH. DUTT (DATTA), *The literature of Bengal. A biographical and critical history from the earliest times closing with a review of intellectual progress under British rule in India*, Calcutta and London 1895; D. C. SEN, *History of Bengali language and literature*, Calcutta 1911; P. CHAUDHURI, *The story of Bengali literature*, Calcutta 1917; K. N. DAS, *A history of Bengali literature*, Naogaon, Rajshahi 1926; J. C. GHOSH, *Bengali literature*, London 1948; SUKUMAR SEN, *History of Bengali literature*, New Dehli 1960. See also the relevant sections in V. K. GOKAK (editor), *Literatures in modern Indian languages*, Delhi 1957; H. VON GLASENAPP, *Die Literaturen Indiens*, Stuttgart 1961, p. 333.

The reasons of this peculiar development are easy to find in the political and economic history of the country. Domestic culture flourished under the Buddhist dynasty of the Pālas (8th–11th centuries) and the Hindu Senas (12th century), but afterwards the invasion of the Pathans and other Muslims not only put an end to the independence of Bengal, but also distorted the country to such an extent that, for a couple of centuries, its culture almost ceased to exist. A similar development repeated itself in the second half of the 18th century, when the British took hold of Bengal; the results of the clash of the domestic economy with the new British order are too well known to be mentioned here. Again, literature lost its basis and rapidly decayed, to be replaced, more than half a century later, by a new literature, very different from the old poetry.

In spite of all differences, the oldest and the middle periods of Bengali literature share several characteristic features which we shall try to sum up. They are of such importance that in a way they seem directly to shape all pre-modern Bengali literature and to be the results of rather strict, though never codified rules that were generally obeyed and followed.

1. The Bengali language is one of the so-called New Indian languages and belongs to the eastern group of what has developed from the speech of the Aryans who had come to Northern India in the second millennium B.C. to Aryanize the whole region. In spite of the fact that, approximately about the beginning of our millennium, the older Prākritis and Apabhramśas were replaced by these New Indian languages in everyday use, it was no easy task for the majority of them to find recognition as languages of literature. Since long, Hindu society had accepted as its prestige language Sanskrit which continued to maintain this position till at least the middle of our millennium, if not even later. The situation in Bengal was further complicated by the centuries-long Muslim domination. Muslim rulers, though occasionally supporting literature in Bengali, in general used Persian as their court language and the majority of them obviously despised the simple vernacular and did not consider this worth becoming the language of "high" literature. And finally, when Persian lost this privileged position, it was again not replaced immediately by Bengali but by English, and the former had to fight hard for the restoration of what would appear to be the natural state of affairs, in this respect. In other words, never throughout the long pre-modern periods had Bengali become the prestige language in its natural surroundings and on its native soil, never had it gained the full recognition, especially by the upper strata of society, and never had it been cultivated in a proper way. It is no coincidence that it had to wait till the beginning of the modern period for its first grammars and dictionaries. Its development was quite spontaneous and elements of various dialects had much easier access to its literature than in languages the grammar of which had been codified.

This attitude must have become firmly rooted in the minds of the Bengalis themselves. Many great masters of Bengali poetry, such as Murāri Gupta, Kṛṣṇadās Kabirāj, Gobindadās Kabirāj and even Bhāratcandra Rāy wrote not only in Bengali, but also in Sanskrit. And as if somehow feeling that their

mother tongue was not "noble" enough to be used in literature, an artificial language called Brajabuli was created in the Middle Ages and widely used by many Bengali Vaiṣṇava poets.

2. Closely connected with the above-mentioned position of Bengali is the fact that we seldom find in it what is known, in other literatures, as court poetry. From the point of view of social stratification of literature, there had always existed in Bengal, till the 19th century, some literary creation occupying a higher position and more appreciated by the upper strata of society than poetry in Bengali, viz. first of all works composed in Sanskrit, on the one hand, and in Persian, on the other. The disadvantageous consequences of this situation for Bengali poets are obvious. It was very difficult for them to secure a royal patronage, to be allowed to enjoy not only the esteem, but also the economic advantages resulting from such a position, and to be able to devote all their abilities and time to literature. In a way we may state that only seldom and rather as an exception, the pre-modern Bengali literature reached the position of a true "high literature."

3. Just as the Bengali language, never considered an official and prestige language, was not cultivated theoretically, pre-modern Bengali literature was characterized by a complete lack of any theoretical writings on literature, poetics, aesthetics or stylistics. In other words, it did not create any codified aesthetic canon of its own which would help the poets to learn to write and their audiences and readers to discern between "good" and "bad" literature. It will suffice to recall numerous Sanskrit works on poetics and their innumerable rules to realize how different the situation was in Bengal. On the one hand, Bengali poets simply followed the example of their predecessors and were led more or less by their poetic instinct, on the other, some of them who were acquainted with Sanskrit literature made free use of various Sanskrit works on poetics, especially that by Rūpa Gosvāmī, and to a certain extent adapted some of their rules to Bengali. Literary criticism of any kind was similarly absent in pre-modern Bengali literature and could have hardly been compensated for by a few anthologies of Vaiṣṇava poems which at least indicated what the general consensus held to be the best achievements in this particular branch.

4. This "non-official" character of older Bengali literature meant, on the other hand, that poets, either consciously or instinctively, addressed their writings to the broad strata of readers, that they did not write to satisfy the refined taste of a narrow circle of connoisseurs, but people illiterate in their majority and with no literary erudition. This fact is clearly reflected in older Bengali poetry. One cannot miss its innumerable contacts with Bengali folk poetry as preserved till today. The same metres are used by both of them, the same figures of poetry appear in both of them. The style of a classical epic is very similar to the style of a folk ballad, and so on.²

² DINESHCHANDRA SEN, *The folk-literature of Bengal*, Calcutta 1920; LAL BEHARI DAY, *Folk-tales of Bengal*, London 1913; GEETA MAJUMDAR, *Folk tales of Bengal*,

It was most probably this peculiar character of pre-modern Bengali literature which enabled it to accept, on the thematic level, so many indigeneous elements of non-Aryan origin, which form one of the most characteristic features of Bengali epics. In this respect, poetry reflected, in a true way, all the peculiarities of Bengali Hinduism with its numerous goddesses and the myths surrounding them, often unknown in the other regions of Hindu India. As soon as they became the object of worship of the Hindu masses, literature opened its doors to their myths and glorifications. Many other proofs of close contacts between older Bengali poetry and folk poetry will be found in the following chapters.

5. The above-mentioned non-existence of a codified aesthetic canon in Bengali does not mean, of course, that pre-modern Bengali literature was free from any conventions and taboos. It is a well-known fact that even folk poetry of any community has them, always avoiding certain things and preferring other ones. In their entirety, these form a bulk of rules, unwritten but generally respected. The same is true of older Bengali literature.

Perhaps the most conspicuous feature of this literature is the almost complete lack of any secular writings, before the 18th century, the only exception being a few works by Muslim Bengali poets. It has been stated many times that the bulk of pre-modern Bengali literature, both epic and lyric, is not only religious in contents, but also sectarian in character. As we shall have ample opportunity to show, in the following chapters, secular elements were not at all absent in old Bengali literature, but any secular story or episode had to be given a religious frame in order to be acceptable in literature. The same is true of the entirely human emotions that were expressed in these works. Vaiṣṇava poets, for instance, do not sing of love of a mother for her child, but of Yaśodā for the infant Krishna; they do not glorify the love of a man for a woman and vice versa, but of Lord Krishna for his beloved Rādhā and the other way about; as in the other parts of India, the story of the hero Rāma was turned into a myth of an incarnation of the god Viṣṇu, etc.

The reasons of this tabooization of secular subjects are not quite clear. Perhaps there did exist works of this character in old Bengal, but these gradually fell into oblivion or sank into the stock of folk poetry. In any case, they were never written down in manuscripts—maybe because manuscripts had become objects of religious reverence and even of worship. Even nowadays, they are often found among other objects of worship in Bengali households. This conception influenced, to a large degree, even Bengali folk poetry which so often prefers religious subjects and motifs to secular ones.

6. Another striking feature of old Bengali literature is its aversion to prose. Without a single exception all old Bengali works were composed in verse. As testified to by a number of inscriptions and documents, prosaic style was known

in fairly remote times, but it was obviously not found fit for literary purposes before the 19th century. Much may be due here to all-Indian traditions; Sanskrit prose narratives or *kāvya*-prose, however, did not find any counterpart or continuation in old Bengali.

In spite of this monopoly position of verse in old Bengali literature, the repertoire of Bengali metric forms is very limited—most probably because of the above-mentioned neglect of a literary style. The most frequently used metres are the syllabic *payār*—a rhymed couplet of essentially narrative verses of equal length—and the *tripadī*, consisting of two shorter, rhymed or unrhymed, portions and a longer line, with the rhyme scheme: a—a (or b)—c / d—d (or e)—c. All poetry tends to rhymes, but with little attention paid to their refinement. It is only the modern period which brings new inventions in the field of poetic forms.

7. Similarly limited appears to be the thematic inventory of older Bengali poetry. Again and again the same themes are elaborated and the same stories re-narrated. Till the 18th century, thematic originality obviously does not count much, the main ambition of poets being, in the field of epics, to re-tell a well-known story in a “more beautiful” way. In lyrics, the mentioned exclusion of purely “human” motifs adds to the thematic monotony of old Bengali poetry and hinders its free development. In the 18th century, however, obvious efforts towards the liberation of poetry from conventional bonds may be witnessed, both in epics (Bhāratcandra Rāy) and in lyrics (Nidhubābū and others).

8. In the majority of pre-modern Bengali literary works, the typical Bengali emotionality comes to the fore, increasing the effect of lyrical poetry, but not infrequently detrimental to the epics. It was this emotionality which, as an essential component of *bhakti* (attitude of utmost devotion to and intense love for God), contributed to the spread of the Krishna cult in mediaeval Bengal and enhanced the beauty of Bengali Vaiṣṇava *padas*. On the other hand, however, it often marred epic qualities of narrative poetry and is probably one of the main causes why no true great epic has ever been composed in Bengali.

As stated already, in the second half of the 18th century the old literary period came to an abrupt end to be replaced, in the 19th century, by the modern phase, which in all respects is essentially different from the previous one. Bengal which was the first area of India to be strongly influenced by the British, preceded the other parts of the sub-continent in creating and developing a modern literature. The 19th-century mighty and fruitful modernization movement, affecting all aspects of life and culture, which had started in Bengal, not only gradually re-shaped its way of thinking and its literature, but became also an example to be followed by other parts of India. For a very long time, then, modern Bengali literature maintained its leading position among Indian literatures and continued discovering new ways in practically all branches of literary activity.

THE MYSTIC CARYĀS

During the long stretch of time covered by the development of Indian culture, there appear periods in which—for reasons which are not obvious—the whole spiritual life of the country experiences unrest and ferment; old values sanctioned by tradition give way to new ones, giving rise to spiritual phenomena unknown before. Such is the period around the middle of the first millennium B.C. when, at the same time, Buddha and Jina make their appearance; such is also the epoch round about the end of the first millennium A.D. when certain spiritual streams and doctrines, hitherto hidden underground, emerge to result in Tantrism. The beginnings of Bengali literature are closely connected with the latter phenomenon.

In 1907, the Bengali philologist Haraprasād Śāstrī discovered in the Darbar Library in Nepal the manuscript of an incompletely preserved set of fifty songs. He added another set of so-called *dohās* to it, which are not Bengali, and edited the book in 1916 in Calcutta.³ The anthology of 50 songs bears the title *Caryāścaryaviniscaya* and contains songs called *caryā*, short compositions of 8–14 lines each. It is a collection of immense literary importance. It represents not only the first document of Bengali literature but is, at the same time, the oldest available specimen of a New Indian literature in general. No less is its importance for Indian philology as well as religious philosophy. In the former respect, it presents the Bengali language in that early period of its development when it had just emerged from the Apabhraṃśa stage and before it became definitely separated from the other languages of the Eastern Indo-Aryan group, i.e. Eastern Hindi, Maithili and Uriya. It was for this latter reason that the collection was claimed not only by Bengalis, but also by the other members of the Eastern Indo-Aryan group as the first monument of their literatures.

The *caryās* are full of problems and incomprehensibilities, both in language and contents. Nevertheless, patient research of many scholars during the past fifty years⁴ has made it possible to clarify their most essential points both linguistically and philosophically and also to date them, with at least a reasonable amount of probability.

The majority of authorities agree in that the songs cannot be of later origin than the 12th century A.D. In the determination of terminus a quo, however, scholars differ from one another. P. C. Bagchi and S. K. Chatterji consider the

³ HARAPRASĀD ŚĀSTRĪ, *Hājār bacharer purāṇa Bāṅgālā bhāṣāy Bauddha gān o dohā*. Calcutta 1916.

⁴ Cf. M. SHAHIDULLAH, *Les chants mystiques de Kāṇha et de Saraha, les Dohā-koṣa et les Caryā*. Paris 1928; M. SHAHIDULLAH, BMS; PRABODH CHANDRA BAGCHI, *Materials for a Critical Edition of the Old Bengali Caryāpadas: a Comparative Study of the Text and Tibetan Translation*. Journal of the Department of Letters, University of Calcutta 30, 1938; SUKUMĀR SEN, *Caryāgiti-padābali*. Calcutta 1956; TARAPADA MUKHERJI, OBLT; ATINDRA MOJUMDER, CP; MANĪNDRA MOHAN BASU, *Caryāpad*. Calcutta 1968. Compare also S. N. Sarma, *Assamese literature*, in this History, IX, ch. I.

10th century to be the most probable time of the beginning of this literature, whereas Sukumar Sen, on the one hand, prefers the 11th century, and Md. Shahidullah and R. Samkṛtyayan, on the other, put the lower limit back to the 8th century. In any case, the manuscript discovered by Haraprasād Śāstrī is much younger, most probably from the 14th–15th century.

The task of an analyst of the *caryās* is made easier by the Sanskrit commentary by Munidatta, probably from the 14th century, and the Tibetan translation of the songs discovered by P. C. Bagchi and S. K. Chatterji.⁵ All these materials have already been edited, analysed and commented upon in a rather voluminous mass of literature, so that we may try to sum up the most essential results of modern research in this field.

The conception of the culturally-historical and religio-philosophical categorization of the *caryās* is more or less uniform. H. P. Śāstrī was certainly not right—or at least oversimplified the situation—when he called the songs Buddhist. In their basic tone they are, first of all, Tantrik, irrespective of whether their authors were Tantrik Buddhists or Tantrik Hinduists. Some of the songs even do not allow of such a strict delimitation. In no case are they to be regarded as songs with a primarily aesthetic function; they are rather compositions of a didactic character, meant to enlighten the listener. Their aesthetic element, however, should not be overlooked.

The historical context of the *caryās* and their ideological contents are well characterized by Sashibhusan Dasgupta: "Side by side with the commonly known theological speculations and religious practices there has been flowing in India an important religious undercurrent of esoteric yogic practices from a pretty old time; these esoteric practices, when associated with the theological speculations of the Śaivas and the Śāktas, have given rise to Śaiva and Śākta Tāntricism; when associated with the Buddhist speculations, have given rise to the composite religious system of Buddhist Tāntricism; and again, when associated with the speculations of Bengal Vaiṣṇavism the same esoteric practices have been responsible for the growth of the esoteric Vaiṣṇava cult, known as the Vaiṣṇava Sahajiyā movement."⁶

The basis of all these esoteric doctrines was, so to say, two articles of faith: Firstly, that the non-absolute world and all its elements including human beings are penetrated by undesirable duality, and secondly, that this duality can be removed by spiritual endeavour (*sādhana*), the result of which is the attainment of the Supreme Bliss (*mahāsukha*). Many differences occurred, however, as far as the conception of this duality and the ways towards its removal were concerned.

It is only the Absolute—conceived either in an abstract way or as a personified absolute deity—which does not know duality. Duality appears everywhere where phenomenalization takes place, where anything is born or arises. The

⁵ P. C. BAGCHI, op. cit.

⁶ S. DASGUPTA, ORC, pp. xxxiii–xxxv.

very birth of a human being is a starting-point of duality, and this is why everything born is predestined to perish. Duality can appear on all levels and in various aspects: as the negative and the positive, the static and the dynamic, the active and the inert, the subjective and the objective; but also as the male (Śiva) and the female (Śakti), as is the case with Tantrik Hinduism.

India has certainly always been thinking much—more than anything else—about the ways to the attainment of the ultimate aim of all human efforts, i.e. salvation (*mukti*), irrespective of whether it was conceived as the liberation of the spiritual component of man from the cycle of incessant rebirths, as the Buddhist *nirvāṇa*, or as the Tantrik Supreme Bliss, i.e.—in Tantrik terminology—about the ways to the destruction of duality. *Karma-mārga*, *bhakti-mārga*, *jñāna-mārga*, sacrifices, study of sacred scriptures, prayers, invocations of gods, asceticism, meditations etc.—every effort was basically aimed at this ultimate goal. Tantrik streams rehabilitated old well-tested yogic practices to be used for the attainment of non-duality, but certainly not to help the adherent to deaden his emotional perceptions and body in general. It was one of the basic contributions of these trends that they evolved the doctrine which found its culmination in the Vaiṣṇava Sahajiyā school: The existence of gods is of no significance and it is of no use worshipping them; similarly useless are all sacrifices, prayers, meditations, asceticism and self-mortification. All truth is to be looked for and may be found in the very body of man, in what is inborn (*saha-ja-*) within it. It is this Sahaja which is the Absolute, and to attain it means to unify the elements creating duality within the body and within each personality, to combine the male and the female principles. It is necessary “den verborgenen Kräften . . . nachzuspüren und diese für die Heilsgewinnung zu benutzen.”⁷ Sahajiyā Buddhism does not diminish or even deny the significance of the terms *śūnyatā* (void) and *karuṇā* (compassion), but gives them a new interpretation: “Now, in Sahajiyā Buddhism Śūnyatā (void) and Karuṇā (compassion), transformed as the Prajñā and the Upāya, are held to be the two primary attributes of the ultimate reality which is Sahaja . . . Prajñā and Upāya represent the principles of dualism and the unification of the two in a supreme non-dual state is the final aim of the Buddhist Sahajiyās. The practical yogic method for the realisation of the Sahaja is, therefore, fundamentally based on the principle of the union of Prajñā and Upāya. The union of Prajñā means, in the first place, the union of the female and the male, who are considered to be the manifestations of Prajñā and Upāya respectively . . . Upāya as the Lord (called Vajrasattva, or the principle of immutable adamantine existence) resides in the highest pole of the cerebrum region and Prajñā as the world-force resides in the lowest pole . . . ; the inner union consists in the raising of the Goddess from the navel region and in making her unite with the Lord of the cerebrum region.”⁸

⁷ HELMUTH VON GLASENAPP, *Buddhistische Mysterien. Die geheimen Lehren und Riten des Diamant-Fahrzeugs*. Stuttgart 1940, p. 27.

⁸ S. DASGUPTA, ORC, pp. xxxvi-xxxvii.

One has to confess that these principles are sometimes hard to grasp and understand. This, however, is one of the features of these doctrines. They are esoteric in character and their contents are believed not to be conveyable in the simple terms of a "normal" philosophical doctrine. We shall see below which special forms of expression were evolved to indicate rather than to communicate certain truths, in the poetry of these currents.

Yet another no less important element appears in these esoteric schools with regard to the communication of truth. It is the *guru*vāda, the stress put on the basic role of the *guru*-teacher—who at the same time comes to the fore even in many scholarly disciplines.⁹ The *guru* is far more than a mere communicator; he is, first of all, a living example to be followed and imitated, an inspirator of the search for individual experience and a support on the difficult path leading towards the ultimate goal. He does not even simply preach, he rather leads the adherent along the spiritual way.

In close connection with the stress put on yogic practices, a special Tantrik physiology and a peculiar conception of sexuality appeared here. Later yogic schools are renowned for their physio-anatomic "research"; its basis seems to have been definitely shaped as early as the time of the composition of the songs. It dealt with the anatomic location of the main centres of spiritual activity of man and with definite spiritual principles. It was a current conception that the seat of the male principle was the head (*sahasrāra*) and that the female principle resided in the lower part of the trunk (*mūladhāra*). The actual places of their localization were called *cakras*. (The human body is presented as a microcosmos, containing all principles occurring in the macrocosmos.) Other schools placed the male principle into the right side and the female into the left side of the body (the *Ardhanarīśvara*-type). The two aspects of the supreme reality are connected here by two nerves, the left *Idā* and the right *Pīṅgalā*, and by two corresponding channels of life breaths, *Prāṇa* and *Apāna*. The aim of all practices and efforts (*sādhana*) is, in the former instance, to connect both *cakras* ("to make the life power ascend from the *mūladhāra* to the *sahasrāra*"), in the latter, to dominate both streams of life breaths and try to force them into the middle, central nerve called *suṣumnā*.

The very terminology of some of these doctrines indicates a bisexual conception; from here it was but a step to the actual fructification of bisexual duality and the utilization of sexual union for the purpose of spiritual elevation. Man and woman are natural expressions of spiritual reality; a condition of its attainment is the "supreme bliss," resulting from their unification, both spiritual and physical.

It was most probably the logic of this argumentation which opened the door of spiritual life to what is sometimes called "sexual orgies." The Tantrayoga recognizes some of these trends till today; they have turned sexual union into

⁹ Cf., e.g., the importance attached to the *guru* in the theory of literature by Abhinavagupta.

some kind of yogic ritual. There is no doubt that this element plays an important role in the *caryās*, in which many verses are found that contain allusions to the Sahajiyā fructification of the sexual urge instead of its suppression, which was usual in other religious schools and trends.

Atindra Mojumder calls it “the mystery of the human form or worship through the body,” and continues: “To the Sahaja ascetics the life of scrupulous austerity was, in reality, some form of negative abnormality which was unjust and tended to develop unwholesome perversion in the human mind. The human body and mind yearned for the enjoyment of all natural pleasures which would bring it pure bliss and happiness. But to repress these healthy and spontaneous passions in the name of the scriptures, virtue and customs and under the pretext of God-worship, would inflict irreparable damage to the human mind.”¹⁰

Let us observe that it is not at all certain where these ideas had originated. Niharranjan Roy stresses connections of Central and Eastern India with Kashmir, Tibet, Nepal and Bhutan, since the middle of the 7th century, as the possible source of new spiritual trends; it is very probable that Bengal was, especially under Dharmapāla and Devapāla—whose reigns ($\pm$ 770–810 and $\pm$ 810–850) constitute the most brilliant chapter in the country’s ancient history—strongly influenced by such connections. No less important, however, may have been the penetration of non-Aryan local traditions containing some elements of magic, into Hinduism and Buddhism. And, as a further possible source, the above-mentioned “underground” trends of esoteric doctrines must be mentioned, traces of which had appeared already in the Atharvaveda and, again in a much stronger form, in Tantrism.

In any case, the *caryās* are a remarkable result of some trends of this kind. The plural must be used here because the preserved set of the *caryās* does not represent any single “school.” Though the principle of their anthologization is not at all clear, it was certainly not the principle of an unambiguously defined religio-philosophical doctrine. Everything appears mixed up here, Buddhism with Hinduism, Tantricism with Yoga, Sahajayāna with Vajrayāna, as if any distinction of this kind had altogether lost significance for the adherents of these currents. No opposition of Hinduism and Buddhism is considered here; if any opposition has to be stated, it is the opposition of philosophical dogmatism against the Sahaja, the opposition of scriptures and prayer-saying against the *sādhana*. Everybody is himself the only constructor of his own salvation and no school or religious group, which he may claim to belong to or whose prescriptions he may respect, can help him much.

Before introducing the songs themselves, let us mention, in short, their language. It is not its origin or grammar which has to be mentioned here, but one of its peculiarities, for which it was called *sandhyābhāṣā*. The majority of texts do not express the ideas that constitute their contents in a direct way. Sometimes they do use a simple poetic expression, i.e. either a statement or a

¹⁰ ATINDRA MOJUMDER, CP, pp. 51–2.

periphrasis, by means of similes and metaphors, but no less frequently they prefer a way of expression that is incapable of philological explanation: the individual words and their combinations do not result in any sense at all or give only a secondary meaning. The aim of this peculiarity seems to be the desire to veil the ideas expressed into a certain language code comprehensible only to the initiated. Unless we have mastered this code we cannot understand the contents of the songs properly, even if we know the language used very well.

It is not certain whether the term *sandhyābhāṣā* means "twilight language," as propounded by H. P. Śāstrī, D. L. Snellgrove, Lama Anagarika Govinda and others, or "intentional language" (from *saṃ+dhā-*, *fang pien shuo* in Chinese), as proposed by Vidhusekhar Śāstrī, P. C. Bagchi, Sukumar Sen and others. In any case the following note on the use of this language, by Lama Anagarika Govinda, seems to be correct: "This symbolic language is not only meant to protect the holiest from profanization by intellectual curiosity and from the misuse of yogic methods and psychic powers by the ignorant and non-initiate; it was prompted chiefly by the fact that common parlance cannot express the highest experiences of the mind."¹¹

Because of the use of this language we cannot, till today, define the exact meaning of all words and combinations of words and "translate" each line with certainty. Scholars differ from each other in the interpretation of many places, especially where the *caryās* belong to the category of the altogether "dark" songs.

From the point of view of directness of expression, Sukumar Sen discerns between three types of *caryās*. The first comprises songs without an allegorical meaning, in the second both a direct and an allegorical meaning may be found, and the third category consists of pure allegories, simply incongruous or incomprehensible if read as mere statements. It is this last group which represents the *sandhyābhāṣā* in the full sense of the term. These songs, as put by Tarapada Mukherji, are "based upon what may be described as incompatible and incongruous statement".¹² Let us quote, as an instance, the song No. 33:

My house is in the town; I have no neighbour.
 I have no rice in the pot; I serve always.
 The frog goes on growing with the serpent.¹³
 What! does the drawn milk enter the teat?
 The bullock calved; the cow is barren. He is milked
 In the pail at these three periods of the day.
 He who is wise is surely unwise.
 He who is a thief is surely an honest man.
 Daily the jackal fights with the lion.
 Few understand the song of the venerable Dhenḍhana.¹⁴

¹¹ LAMA ANAGARIKA GOVINDA, *Foundations of Tibetan Mysticism*. London 1960, p. 46.

¹² TARAPADA MUKHERJI, OBLT, p. 15.

¹³ But SUKUMAR SEN, HBL, p. 33: "The stream of life flows on swiftly."

¹⁴ Translated by M. SHAHIDULLAH, BMS, p. 80.

Let us not be misled by the seemingly “poetic” impression achieved by this singular accumulation of contradictions. They have not been used here in order to strengthen the aesthetic effect of the song, but to hide other meanings. Or, we had better say, they give a hint of what cannot be expressed. This idea of the inexpressibility of spiritual truth is repeated several times in the *caryās*; for instance, also in the song No. 40:

Whatever is perceived by the mind is hocus pocus.
 So are the Śāstras, the books and the rosaries.
 Say how the Sahaja can be told,
 Where the body, the word and the mind cannot enter.
 The guru instructs the disciple in vain.
 How can he speak of that which is beyond the reach of the way of speech?
 The more it was said, the more it was a subterfuge.
 The guru is dumb, the disciple is deaf.
 How can Kāṇha speak of the jewel of the Buddha?
 As the dumb explains to the deaf.¹⁵

If we cannot “explain” the *sandhyābhāṣā*-songs in a reliable way, we can, with more hope of success, try to penetrate into another category of the *caryās*, those in which the meaning is given allegorically. Let us, for instance, quote the song No. 21, the well-known “mice-allegory”:

The Mouse’s food is at dark night.
 The Mouse eats the ambrosia, (it) exhausts the food.
 O Yogin, kill the breath-Mouse,
 On account of which the going and the coming do not cease.
 The Mouse pierces the existence, (it) digs holes.
 Considering the Mouse to be unsteady, be ready for its destruction.
 The Mouse is black, (its) colour is not observed.
 Ascending the sky it grazes on the āman paddy.¹⁶
 Since that time the Mouse is elated.
 Make it motionless with the Enlightenment of the good guru.
 “When the food of the Mouse is cut off,” says Bhusuku,
 “Then the bond is removed.”¹⁷

Irrespective of the fact that this song has been translated in many different ways, with considerable differences in the interpretation of the individual lines,¹⁸ it remains true that it is based on a simple allegory aimed at expressing the necessity of the removal of ignorance and the bonds arising from it.

The predilection for metaphorical and even allegorical ways of expression, closely connected with the described use of symbolic language, is one of the most characteristic features of the *caryās*. The body is called a tree with five branches (songs No. 1 and 45), worldly existence a river (5 and 33), the word of

¹⁵ Translated by M. SHAHIDULLAH, BMS, p. 83.

¹⁶ These two lines, however, according to S. DASGUPTA, ORC, p. 38: “This rat is Time or death itself—but in it there is no colour. When it rises to the void, it moves there and drinks nectar.”

¹⁷ Translated by M. SHAHIDULLAH, BMS, p. 76.

¹⁸ Cf. also ATINDRA MOJUMDER, CP, pp. 36–38.

the *guru* a bow the arrow of which pierces the mind (28), or an axe to cut down the tree of the body (45); by spreading the net of illusion, only the doe of illusion is caught (23); the significant *karuṇā* (compassion) is called a boat (8), a chessboard (12) or a cloud (30), and the respective symbols are often elaborated into whole songs.

Even more often, however, is the allegorical meaning of the individual objects to be guessed, or rather known, which makes the understanding of many a verse so difficult. To quote only one instance—the *caryā* No. 9 opens with the following two lines:

Smashing the strong pillar of *evaṃkāra*
and breaking the various spreading bonds . . .

What is meant by the *evaṃkāra* here? Shahidullah interprets it as “external knowledge,”¹⁹ Sukumar Sen as “the incessant awareness of duality,”²⁰ but in the Dohakosa of Tillapada we read: “The supra-mundane which is of the shape of the letter *e*, which is adorned in the middle with the letter *vaṃ* is the seat of all kindness—the basket of Buddha’s treasures.”²¹

On the other hand, it is just this allegorical way of expression and metaphorical use which remained firmly rooted in Bengali poetry. Not infrequently do we read here idioms and maxims, to be met again much later, either in common speech or in poetic language. “The deer is the enemy (of everybody) because of his own flesh” (No. 6), “The bangle is on your arm—do not take the mirror (to see it)” (No. 32), “Better an empty cowshed than a naughty ox” (No. 39), “Is he who has mistaken a rope for a boa with fright, swallowed up by it?” (No. 41)—such and similar utterances can often be found in subsequent Bengali literature, testifying to an unbroken link between the *caryās* and later poetry.

Another feature shared by later writings and the *caryās* is the numerous *bhaṇitās*, usually final parts of songs comprising a personal name, in most cases probably the name of the author of the respective song. Only less than ten of the almost fifty *caryās* extant do not contain any name of this kind. The majority have them in a “classical” form, such as, e.g., “Bhusuku says etc.,” or “This song was sung by Kukkuripā.” It is not certain, however, whether the names which are preserved in these songs are in all cases real names of the respective *siddhācāryas*, i.e. teachers of the doctrine; some of them may be mere pen-names, or names of the *gurus* of the poets who actually composed the songs and in this way “dedicated” them to their preceptors.

A higher number of *caryās* bear the names of Kāṇha and Bhusuku, less those of Saraha, Lui, Kukkuripā and Śānti. In the remaining cases, only one song appears under each name. Among the former, Lui(pāda) and Bhusuku are

¹⁹ M. SHAHIDULLAH, BMS, p. 71.

²⁰ SUKUMĀR SEN, *Caryāgiti-padābali*, ed. cit., p. 161.

²¹ P. C. BAGCHI, *The Dohakosa of Tillapada*, Commentary to Verse No. 25. *Journal of the Department of Letters, University of Calcutta* 38, p. 164.

personalities well known from tradition, but their identity with the possible authors of the *caryās* is not at all certain.

As stated by Tarapada Mukherji, "the songs do not exhibit an episodic sequence. They are complete within themselves and individually they express an independent idea much of which is, of course, repeated in other songs."²² Not only this; as in practically all subsequent Bengali poetry, poets reveal a tendency towards conceiving their ideas within a single couplet, bound together not only formally by a rhyme or assonance, but also thematically. Their metrical scheme is called, doubtless with right, moraic by Sukumar Sen,²³ with two variants. The first, comprising 15–16 morae, reminds us of the later *payār*, the second, of 25–26 morae, would be the basis of the later *tripadī*. Obviously no extraordinary attention was paid to rhymes, very often grammatical and in many cases rather free. As ascertained by Sukumar Sen, the *caryā* songs in general "follow the pattern of Jayadeva."²⁴

Unfortunately, the preserved collection of the *caryās* is too small not only to allow of any definite conclusions concerning further characteristics of this unique "poetic school," but also to answer the very interesting question of their influence on other Bengali poetry. In later literary works, they have no direct continuation at all. In many a respect, however, they do not represent a dead branch.

In spite of their exclusively spiritual and even mystic contents, the *caryās* reflect the everyday life and reality surrounding simple people, poor and toiling villagers rather than idle richmen. Atindra Mojumder even connects this social and economic background of the songs with their ideology: "As this perennial want and poverty pervaded a very large section of the society it was inevitable for the *Caryā* poets to strike a note of frustration and hopelessness in their literary efforts. Everywhere in these lyric poems the note of melancholy was predominant. The short, but vivid, accounts given in several of these poems were all tales of sorrow and privation."²⁵

However disputable the conclusions of the above quoted author may be, it cannot be denied that the authors of the *caryās* must have stood very near the lower strata of society; that they exploited their way of life for materials to compose their songs and that, therefore, as observed by Asitkumār Bandyopādhyāy,²⁶ their songs were also meant for these lower strata. In this respect, the *caryā-gītis* are in unison with the overwhelming majority of old Bengali poetry.

The authors of the *caryās* were doubtless mystics and deeply religious men. Their poetry was obviously spontaneous, unbound by any rules of poetics and sincere to the utmost. The *caryās* are expressions of their deep-felt belief and

²² TARAPADA MUKHERJI, OBLT, p. 11.

²³ SUKUMAR SEN, HBL, p. 23.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 28.

²⁵ ATINDRA MOJUMDER, CP, p. 76.

²⁶ ASITKUMĀR BANDYOPĀDHYĀY, BSI, I, p. 200.

genuine emotions—exactly as we find these in the *padas* of much later Vaiṣṇava poets; and even when speaking about the most obscure and esoteric truth, they remain human in the very sense of the word—exactly as the authors of the later *maṅgal-kāvyas* when they were depicting stories of gods and goddesses. It is this human overtone which makes the *caryās* a real gem of the oldest Bengali literature.

It has been stated many times that it is the Bengali Bāuls who seem to be the most direct heirs of the singers of the old *caryās*. Edward C. Dimock has given a good characteristic of them: “A Bāul is one who, dressed in tattered cast-off garment deliberately made up of remnants of clothing previously worn by both Hindus and Muslims, wanders incessantly, living on whatever those who listen to his songs, which are his only form of worship, choose to give him . . . He plays a primitive but haunting one-stringed instrument, called *ek-tārā*, and the songs he sings are beautiful in melody and thought, as gentle and as stirring as the wind which is his home. The Bāul is thought mad because he goes deliberately and powerfully against the current of custom.”²⁷

Bāul songs²⁸ are exalted expressions of boundless love towards the deity which, however, is never defined in terms of any definite religious system or sect. Rich in metaphors and imagery, they are spontaneous and effective, emotional to the utmost and sometimes filled with that rare kind of wisdom which springs from an intense personal experience.

When will I find him, that man of my heart ?
He is lost. In my search I have wandered near and far . . .
He distracts my mind. But when I find him
At last my mind will be at peace . . .
If you know where he is hiding, be kind—
Tell me of it.²⁹

Bāul songs were the first branch of Bengali folk poetry to attract the attention of both Bengali and foreign poets, philosophers and folklorists; Rabīndranāth Ṭhākur was among the first to collect and even imitate them. Since that time, hundreds of Bāul songs have been collected and edited,³⁰ analysed and commented upon.³¹ Most of their authors remained anonymous, but there are many Bāuls who are well known by name, such as Lālan Phakīr, Madan Bāul, Pāglā Kānāi, etc. Their songs are a rich source of poetic beauty and an eloquent testimony to the poetic genius of the simple uneducated Bengali village folk.

²⁷ EDWARD C. DIMOCK, JR., *The Place of the Hidden Moon*. Chicago 1966, p. 251.

²⁸ In English, *The Mirror of the Sky: Songs of the Bāuls from Bengal*, translated by DEBEN BHATTACHARYA, London 1969.

²⁹ E. C. DIMOCK, *op. cit.*, p. 261.

³⁰ UPENDRANĀTH BHATTĀCĀRYA, *Bāṅglār bāul o bāul gān*. Calcutta 1958; MUHAMMAD MANSURUDDĪN, *Lālan Sāh Phakīr gān*. Sāhitya patrikā 2, No. 1, 1959, pp. 97–198.

³¹ EDWARD C. DIMOCK, *op. cit.*, pp. 249–270; S. DASGUPTA, *ORC*, pp. 157–187; KṢITIMOHAN SEN, *Bāṅglār bāul*. Calcutta 1951.

THE MUSLIM CONQUEST OF BENGAL

Historians usually—and rightly—state that the history proper of Bengal starts with the rule of the Buddhist dynasty of the Pālas, i.e. in the middle of the 8th century A.D. It was in that period that the Bengali language arose and the first literary creation in Bengali, the *caryās* described in the preceding chapter, were produced. Under the Pālas, the eastern part of India experienced both economic prosperity and a cultural flourishing-period. The *caryās* are far from being the only document of that period. The famous Buddhist centre of learning, Nālanda, well-known Pāla bronzes and sculptures in stone, the spread of Buddhism to Tibet, innumerable writings in Sanskrit—to recall only a few of the most typical examples, they all witness the successful cultural policy of the Pālas.

After three centuries and a half, the Bengali part of the Pāla kingdom fell into the hands of the Hindu Sena kings ($\pm$ 1095) who furthered the Hinduization of the whole region and the immigration of Brahmin pandits into Bengal. Buddhism began to recede to peripheral parts of the country and to give way to Hindu cults, not only of Śiva and Viṣṇu, but also of various local deities of non-Aryan origin. It was most probably in that period that a hardening of the caste system and the integration of practically all inhabitants into it took place, an event of much significance for the subsequent development of Bengali literature, as it opened its door to many non-Sanskritic elements. On the other hand, the Senas were ardent supporters of the “high” Sanskrit culture. Under one of them, Lakṣmaṇasena, the famous Gītagovinda was composed by Jayadeva, most probably the court-poet of the king. The immortal poem bears testimony not only to the high level of culture attained in that period, but also to the spread of the *bhakti* attitude among the Bengali Vaiṣṇavas and, though not composed in Bengali, had an immense influence on later Bengali Vaiṣṇava poetry.

A more exact stratification of the Vaiṣṇava and the Śaivite sects in Bengal of those days is hardly possible for lack of reliable data. We may, however, suppose that both these sects had many followers, Viṣṇuism probably predominating in the western parts of the country and Śivaism in the East; or, from another point of view, Viṣṇuism seems to have had more followers among the upper strata of Hindu society and Śivaism among the village folk. Such, at least, seems to be the situation as may be concluded from the subsequent development reflected in later literary works.

In any case, however, the worship of local deities of Bengal must have played a very important role in the life of village communities. These deities were many, but the most typical among them were the Śakti goddesses, later associated with the “orthodox” gods of the Hindu pantheon: Manasā, the snake-goddess, Caṇḍī, probably the protectress of hunting and commerce, and some others (Ṣaṣṭhī, Śītalā etc.). We shall see later on how peculiar results were

brought about by the combination of these old deities with the traditional purāṇic lore.

In 1202, the Turki invaders under Bakhtiar besieged Nadiyā and put an end to the Hindu supremacy in Bengal. Gradually Muslims took hold of the whole region, bringing about a radical change in many important aspects of life. Towns were looted, temples and monasteries destroyed; many intellectuals, i.e. Brahmins and Buddhists, preferred to leave the country and to look for shelter in adjacent territories not yet occupied by Muslims; it was obviously in that time that the *caryās* were brought to Nepal.

Along with the economic basis and political power, domestic culture suffered heavily. As put by Sukumar Sen, "the intellectual activities of Bengal apparently came to a stop for about a couple of centuries, and as a result we draw a perfect blank for the period in the literary and cultural history of the country. Not a single line of literary composition in Bengali can be assigned with any assurance to this dark period of early Muhammedan rule, the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries."³²

However, historians of Bengali literature do not fail to recognize also the other, much brighter side of this dark coin. The early Muslim conquerors did not force their religion upon the masses of Bengal; and by disrupting the country's connections with the orthodox Hindu learning and the official Sanskrit culture, they created enough space for a natural and free evolution of domestic elements, many of which would have hardly succeeded in surviving a stronger pressure from above. We may assume that it was in these dark centuries that indigenous (*laukik*) cults assumed their definite form in which we know them from later writings, and that in the same period the soil had been prepared for the later mighty heyday of Bengali Viṣṇuism, connected with the name of Caitanya.

In the 15th century, the beginning of the second period of the development of Bengali literature, several works in Bengali emerged in different parts of the country, representing various trends of literary activities. Most probably in the first half of the century, Kṛtibās composed his Bengali Rāmāyaṇ; in 1494, Bijay Gupta wrote his Manasāmaṅgal and a year later, Bipradās his Manasābijay; and in 1473–80, Mālādhār Basu's Śrīkṛṣṇabijay saw the light and not much later, Candīdās' Śrīkṛṣṇakīrtan. It is not so important, for our present consideration, that these dates are not altogether reliable. In general, we may state with a sufficient degree of certainty that in the 15th century, almost at the same time, many important documents of Bengali poetry emerge, representing, in their whole, all the three main trends that were to become so productive in later development: "translations" of Sanskrit epics, *maṅgal-kāvyas*, and elaborations of the Krishna theme. And, what is no less important, they emerge so to say in finished forms, testifying to the fact that they must have been preceded by a fairly long development, not documented by the manuscripts extant.

³² SUKUMAR SEN, HBL, p. 38.

For this reason, it is generally believed that the tradition of all these poetic works goes far back into the past. During the centuries preceding the 15th, people lived their religious life and listened to the compositions of their bards and folk-poets who gave expression to their spiritual yearnings and conceptions. It cannot be a mere coincidence that we find, until the present time, all these subjects treated also in genuine folk-literature which, as is well known, is rather conservative, especially where matters connected with religion are concerned. On the other hand, all the early writings mentioned above have many features in common, in spite of their belonging to different sects and treating very diverse subjects. Their metres do not differ in any considerable way, the same metaphors and similes may be found in all of them, the same stylistic devices appear again and again. We shall have ample opportunity to return to these points later on. At the present moment, we must mention a rather conspicuous common element found in the majority of these works—the so-called *bāromāsi*, or the song of the twelve months.³³

In the *Manasābijay* by Bipradās (XII, 51), the goddess *Manasā*, when confronted with the unfortunate *Behulā* whose husband she killed with the help of her snakes, retells how she used to be insulted by the father of the dead young man, the merchant *Cando*. She does it in such a way that she enumerates all the twelve months of the year, one after another, and says what happened in each.

In *Caṇḍidās'* *Śrīkṛṣṇakīrtan*, most probably from approximately the same time, we find a part called *Rādhā's caturmāsi*, i.e. *Rādhā's* (song of) four months, in which the abandoned heroine describes her sorrows during the four months of the rainy season, after her beloved *Krishna* left for *Mathurā*. In spite of quite different settings, circumstances and even aim of these two episodes, they follow the same pattern, without influencing each other.

Clearly enough both *Bipradās* and *Caṇḍidās* took over this pattern from elsewhere and their example was followed by many later poets. We may find a *bāromāsi* in *Bijay Gupta's* *Manasāmaṅgal* as well as in the version of the same epic by *Ṣaṣṭhībar*, and also in the much later *Padmāpurāṇ* by *Rādhānāth Rāy Caudhurī*. Three different *bāromāsis* appear in the *Caṇḍīmaṅgal*, with many differences in their general setting, and yet almost uniform in their confrontation of the changes of Nature in the various months of the year enumerated with the emotions of the heroine singing the song. Thus there is *Phullarā's bāromāsi*, in which *Phullarā* tries to dissuade the goddess *Caṇḍī* from her simulated intention to remain with the hunter *Kālketu* in the forest, by depicting all the troubles of the life of a hunter's wife; there is *Suśilā's bāromāsi*, *Suśilā* describing the beauties of the different months in her country to make the merchant *Śrīmanṭa* remain with her for another year; and there is *Khullanā's bāromāsi* which is a story of separation of *Khullanā* from her husband

³³ In more detail, see DUŠAN ZBAVITEL, The Development of the *Bāromāsi* in the Bengali Literature. *ArOr* 29, 1961, pp. 582–619.

who is dwelling abroad for a whole year, the heroine describing her sorrows and troubles during this time.

Bāromāsī may be found also in Rāmkrṣṇa Kābīcandra's Śībāyan, in Balarām Kabiśekhara's Kālikāmaṅgal, in Lālā Jaynārāyaṇ Sen's Harilīlā and even in the late Annadāmaṅgal by Bhāratcandra Rāy; but we come across it also in compositions by Muslim poets (Śekh Fayzullā, Ābdul Kunur Muhammad, Bāhrām Khān etc.), and especially frequently in the lyrical stanzas (*padas*) by many Vaiṣṇava poets who often describe the sorrows of the abandoned Rādhā in the form of *bāromāsī*.

All these facts point to a common source of this peculiar poetic genre which was, without much doubt, folk-poetry. It is certainly no coincidence that we find *bāromāsīs* in modern Bengali folklore, from Midnapore in the West to Sylhet in the East, and that it presents, in its hundreds of variants, a firmly established and in many cases obviously stereotyped poetic genre. The occurrence of this form in works of the 15th century bears testimony to its very old origin. For this reason, it may be not out of place to treat this popular type here, though the respective folksongs have naturally been collected only in recent times.

In general, the folk-*bāromāsīs* as sung in the countryside of both West Bengal and Bangladesh today, can be reduced to five basic types: 1. the religious *bāromāsī*, or the description of various months from the religious point of view, 2. the farmer's *bāromāsī*, or the description of changes in nature and work in the fields during the twelve months, 3. the narrative *bāromāsī*, often an integral part of a larger epic poem, 4. the *biraha kāhīnī*, i.e. the lamentation of a deserted woman, or a description of her sorrows and longing, 5. the test of chastity, or the seduction of a woman.³⁴

Pure examples of the first two types are rather rare. They evidently have all the qualities of old folksongs with a utilitarian purpose; the first could have served as a lesson on religious festivals and duties, the second as a guide for young farmers. In the course of time, they seem to have been replaced by the more elaborate and more attractive types 3-5, lending them some of their elements. When characterizing various months, folk-poets often use elements from both these types.

The narrative *bāromāsī* probably arose later, resulting from the idea to combine the description of the twelve months of the year with a story, to pass from mere description to narration. In folk-poetry, the interest of practically every folktale or epic song can be enhanced by inserting a *bāromāsī*, the opportunity being found in the narrative itself, or convenient circumstances being created for it. Sometimes, the "story" told previously is repeated, in the form of this song, but quite often the *bāromāsī* comprises an integral part of the narrative in the sense that the story would be incomprehensible or, at least, incomplete,

³⁴ CHARLOTTE VAUDEVILLE, in her *Bārahmāsa, les chansons des douze mois dans les littératures indo-aryennes* (Pondichéry 1965), considers the first two types to be essentially identical (p. vi).

if the *bāromāsi* was left out. This is an important point, as it shows that in such a case the *bāromāsi* is no chance addition or insertion.

The *bāromāsi* of separation represents the most frequent type of this poetic genre in Bengali folklore and it must be of considerable antiquity. It has already been pointed out by various authors that it evidently reaches as far back as those days when Bengali merchants, in the course of their trading activities, made voyages to distant countries such as Ceylon, voyages which really often lasted the whole year. It is significant that in many of these songs sung nowadays, the husband for whom the wife longs is still called *sādhu*, i. e. the merchant. *Bāromāsis* of separation are usually comparatively long, each month being given a whole strophe. It must be admitted that many of these songs are even too long to retain the fresh charm of folksongs, with their tedious repetitions and stereotyped phrases describing the wife's longing.

It was most probably the typical fondness of an Indian audience for a happy ending that transformed the conclusion of the *bāromāsi* of separation, providing it with the motive of the husband's return home in the last month. Not in all cases, of course; but quite often, even a final cliché may be found: "Here comes my dear husband, an umbrella over his shoulder."

The *bāromāsi* of the test obviously represents a direct continuation of the song of separation in the process of development of the Bengali folk-*bāromāsi*. It retains the characteristics of various months, but changes the real separation of the husband and the wife into an unusual story: The heroine gets married as a little girl, remaining after her marriage, as was usual in such cases, in the house of her parents. The husband sets out on a long journey and returns after many years; the wife does not recognize him after such a long lapse of time, and he makes full use of this by pretending to be a stranger and not revealing to her his identity. He meets her during the twelve months and tests her faithfulness and devotion by trying to seduce her. She rejects his advances and remains true to her husband whom she thinks to be still somewhere abroad. After the year is over, the husband reveals his identity, pleased by her virtue and fidelity. In some variants, however, it is not her own husband who tries her virtue, but a stranger attempting to seduce the lonely wife. Needless to say he does not succeed.

In the course of their hundred-years' development, the folk-*bāromāsis* of all these types have produced a large number of poetic clichés, both to characterize the individual months and to describe the sorrows and longings of the heroine. The fact that some of these clichés appear even in the versions found in classical poetry is another argument in favour of the hypothesis that it was originally from folk-literature that the classical Bengali poetry took over this poetic genre in a more or less accomplished form, because of its popularity. This popularity may be seen even nowadays, the *bāromāsi* still remaining one of the productive types of folk-poetry in Bengal. And what else than an immense popularity may account for the fact that this genre was even able to prevail over such traditional themes as the Rāmāyana-story? More versions of folksongs

have been found³⁵ in which the whole contents of the Rāmāyaṇa, or at least the whole exile of Rāma, Sītā and Lakṣmaṇa is condensed into one single year, in order to enable the singer to retell this story in the form of a *bāromāsi*.³⁶

We have dwelt upon the *bāromāsi* somewhat longer in order to support the hypothesis that when the first works of classical Bengali literature emerged, in the 15th century, they had been preceded by a long and productive development of various subjects and forms, in the field of folk-poetry. Even in those cases where non-Bengali classical models are easy to be found for early compositions, such as the Sanskrit Rāmāyaṇa, Jayadeva's Gītagovinda or the Bhāgavata-purāṇa, the deviations of the versions from these works need not necessarily be understood as contributions and innovations of individual Bengali authors. More often, probably, these deviations resulted from changes which the subject in question underwent, outside the orbit of official culture, in folk-poetry.

³⁵ Saurabh 16, No. 11, 1928, p. 337; Basudhārā 2, No. 1/3, 1958, p. 302.

³⁶ On *bāromāsi* in broader Indian context, see ŚIBAPRASĀD BHATTĀCĀRYA, *Bhāratīya sāhitye bāromāsyā*, Calcutta 1960.

RE-DRESSING ANCIENT HEROES

Since the first centuries A. D., the great Sanskrit epics Mahābhārata and Rāmāyaṇa enjoyed immense popularity in the whole of India and among all strata of Indian society. Sung by wandering bards, they were listened to by the village people who have always been intimately acquainted with their contents and heroes. The epics were also an inexhaustible source of inspiration for ancient Indian poets and dramatists who elaborated their various parts in innumerable poetic, prosaic and dramatic versions, alluded to their heroes and heroines and so revealed the high degree of popularity enjoyed by these epics which had become common property of all Indian peoples.

During the first millennium A. D., however, the attitude of the people to these epics underwent a gradual, but apparent change. They were, so to say, absorbed by the religious tradition, of which they became an inseparable part, side by side with various *śāstras* and *purāṇas*. It was especially the Rāmāyaṇa which rose high in the esteem of the Hindus, after its hero Rāma had been identified with the god Viṣṇu. The most important change of attitude towards these epics was then brought about by the spread of the *bhakti* movement which monopolized these epics, changing them from heroic narratives to devotional literature.

Along with this process, the Brahmins put the reciting of these "sacred" texts in other languages than Sanskrit under an unofficial ban—another proof of their shift from the sphere of literature into that of religion. Nevertheless, during the Muslim period both the Rāmāyaṇa and the Mahābhārata did start to be translated, or rather to be retold, in New Indian languages. Some authors ascribe this event to certain more tolerant Muslim rulers who wanted to get acquainted with the ancient Indian epics in a language accessible to them. Thus Kabīndra Parameśvar, the author of one of the oldest Bengali versions of the Mahābhārata, is said to have been commissioned with the task of retelling the epic in Bengali by Parāgal Khān, and Śrīkar Nandī, the translator of the Aśvamedha canto of the same epic, with that piece of work by his son Chuṭi Khān. This, however, would hardly account for the fact that, most probably from the very beginning, even New Indian versions of such works as the Rāmāyaṇa enjoyed obviously not only general popularity, but also the reverential esteem of the Hindus. The negative attitude of the Brahmins towards writings in New Indian languages must have changed during the initial periods of our millennium. After all, the admission of non-orthodox myths and legends to the enormous purāṇic literature, as was the case with various *maṅgal-kāvyas*, bears testimony to this change of attitude.

Historians of Bengali literature agree in the opinion that it was probably Kṛttibās Ojhā who was the first to retell the Rāmāyaṇa in Bengali. J. C. Ghosh even calls him "the father of Bengali poetry."³⁷ His composition has for centuries been the most popular and beloved book of the Bengali people, and by the

number of its manuscripts it surpasses any other Bengali work by far. Attributes like "the Bible of the people of the Gangetic Valley,"³⁸ "the foundation stone of Bengali literature,"³⁹ etc., show the important place that has been attributed to this book in the history of Bengali literature.

Kṛttibās is, however, also one of the most controversial poets of Bengal. "Leaving aside Baru Caṇḍidās, in polemic discussions concerning mediaeval Bengali poetry, polemics connected with Kṛttibās have been most complicated and full of many adverse opinions," says Asitkumār Bandyopādhyāy in his *Bāṅglā sāhityer itibṛtta*⁴⁰ in which he has summed up these discussions in a very lucid way.

According to his own *Ātmabibaraṇ* or Autobiography, found (ca. 1900) by Hārādhān Datta in a manuscript of the *Rāmāyaṇ*, Kṛttibās was a high-caste Brahmin born in the village Phuliyā on the bank of the river Hooghly. At the age of twelve, he went to study to Nabadvīp (Nadiyā) or somewhere near this important centre of learning, and then approached "the sovereign of Gauṛ" (i.e. West Bengal) with the hope "to become a Rājpaṇḍit" (royal paṇḍit). The ruler was much impressed by his poetic skill and asked him to write a Bengali *Rāmāyaṇ* which the poet did.⁴¹

Discussions centre mostly around the date of the birth of the poet and the identity of the "sovereign of Gauṛ" mentioned. On the ground of astronomical data given in the Autobiography, either the 11th February 1432, or the 16th Māgh⁴² 1398 were suggested by Yogeścandra Rāy as the most probable dates of Kṛttibās' birth. As, however, the description of the Rājā's court points to a Hindu ruler, many historians are inclined to identify him with Gaṇeś (1409–1414), and consequently to fix an earlier date than 1398 for the poet's birthday. It must be said also that there are several doubts and suspicions concerning the authenticity of the *Ātmabibaraṇ* of Kṛttibās. Thus the definite solution of these problems will have to wait till more reliable materials are found. With the exception of Sukumār Sen, who dates the poet "in the middle of the 15th century,"⁴³ the majority of scholars accept the final decades of the 14th century (1380–1399) as the most probable time of his birth, and the beginning of the 15th century as the time in which he wrote his *Rāmāyaṇ*.

Another disadvantage which anyone researching into Kṛttibās' *Rāmāyaṇ* is confronted with, is the fact that the book has been constantly and repeatedly "modernized" when copied by copyists and sung by *gāyens* (singers); its language was changed and made to fit the current stage of development of Bengali, and

³⁸ DINESH CHANDRA SEN, HBLI, p. 170.

³⁹ J. C. GHOSH, BL, p. 35.

⁴⁰ ASITKUMĀR BANDYOPĀDHYĀY, BSI I, p. 457.

⁴¹ See, e.g., *Rāmāyaṇ*, ed. by HAREKRṢṢṆA MUKHOPĀDHYĀY, Calcutta 1957, pp. xx–xxv.

⁴² The Bengali month of *māgh* corresponds to the second half of January and the first of February.

⁴³ SUKUMAR SEN, HBL, p. 68.

many additions were inserted by later interpolators. This must be considered the tax paid for its immense popularity. After Kṛttibās' version was by general consent accepted as the best, those who participated in the preservation of its text strived to increase its quality by inserting anything they considered an enrichment. Thus, for instance, a long part (*śikali*) of 500 verses called Āṅgader rāybār was in the 17th century taken over from the Adbhut Rāmāyaṇ by Nityānanda Ācārya ('Adbhut Ācārya') and added to the sixth canto of Kṛttibās' work. And it is very probable that in the present form of the book, there are far more interpolations of this kind which it will be hard ever to ascertain.

Unfortunately practically no very old and reliable manuscript of the book has been preserved. Thus out of almost 1,500 manuscripts of this work kept in the main four Bengali libraries,⁴⁴ not more than four may be ascribed to the 16th century, and none is older. No critical edition of the whole book has been attempted yet, only the first two cantos being available in better editions.⁴⁵ The historian is left no other way, under these circumstances, but to deal with the present form of the work reminding the reader that what Kṛttibās had written may have been sometimes considerably different.

Kṛttibās' version is no translation of Vālmiki's epic in the modern sense of the term. The Bengali author was a pandit and knew Sanskrit and Vālmiki's *ādikāvya* very well, but he did not translate it verse by verse. He felt free to omit even larger portions (e.g. on the birth of the god Kārtikeya, on Viśvāmitra and his quarrel with Vaśiṣṭha, etc.), to insert, on the other hand, episodes taken from other sources (folk tradition and versions by other authors) or invented by himself, and, finally, to replace Vālmiki's accounts by purāṇic versions. The very extent of his book differs considerably from Vālmiki's original, being almost 12,000 lines shorter.

Kṛttibās directed all his efforts towards the main goal—to create a hymn of praise upon the Rāma-incarnation of Viṣṇu. The devotion to God permeates the whole book and all its parts. *Bhakti*, the feeling of devotion, is the decisive factor influencing both the poet's way of modelling the individual characters of the epic original and his mode of narrating the story.

Throughout the book, listeners are reminded again and again that the Rāmāyaṇ is no ordinary poem, but a religious text; that not only its main story, but even each episode helps the listener to acquire religious merits. Thus in the first canto, before narrating the story of the King Saudās, the poet says:

Listen attentively to the story of Rājā Saudās,
If you do, your body will become pure and rid of sin.⁴⁶

It was obviously from this point of view that Kṛttibās modelled and reshaped the individual characters of his epic. They are meant to serve as ideals

⁴⁴ I.e. the libraries of the University of Calcutta, the Baṅgiya sāhitya pariṣat in Calcutta, the University of Dacca and the Viśvabhāratī in Santiniketan.

⁴⁵ *Ādikāṇḍa*, ed. by NALINIKĀNTA BHATTAŚĀLĪ, Calcutta 1936; *Ayodhyākāṇḍa*, ed. by HIRENDRANĀTH DATTA, Calcutta 1900.

⁴⁶ Rāmāyaṇ, ed. cit., p. 23.

and examples to be followed by all pious Hindus. When creating mischief and doing harm to other people or even to Rāma himself, they cannot help acting as they do, being forced by their destiny—a result of some sins committed in the past or, more frequently, of a Brahmin's curse; themselves, however, they are noble and worthy of being admired and imitated.

This attitude is not infrequently expressed in so many words in the text. In the second canto, when instructing Sītā in her duties, her mother-in-law Kausalyā tells her:

You are the kingly wife, you are the daughter of a king,
Other wives will behave according to your behaviour.⁴⁷

Although this tendency is to be found in the Vālmiki's Rāmāyaṇa also, we find it stronger and more marked in Kṛtibās' version.

"It was intended for the common people," says J. C. Ghosh, "and it has all the engaging qualities of first-rate folk-literature."⁴⁸ Yes, the social address of this Rāmāyaṇa is beyond any doubt. Even such portions as instructions in the duties of a righteous ruler, taken over from Vālmiki's original, are meant for the subjects rather than for the ruler himself. If you are a father, be like Daśaratha; if you are a brother, try to be like Lakṣmaṇa or Bharata; if you are a wife, be like the devoted Sītā—this is one of the main messages conveyed by Kṛtibās to everybody.

To make this message and his work as comprehensible as possible to all his countrymen, Kṛtibās did not hesitate to "Bengalicize" many a detail and, in several places, the whole atmosphere of his composition. It has been pointed out many times how strongly he let himself be influenced by his own surroundings when describing, for instance, various customs, festivals, food, trees, etc. What is no less important, however, is the tendency pervading the whole epic to adapt itself everywhere to the Bengali mentality which seems to prefer the lyrical to the epical and the emotional to the impassive, which likes to be moved to laughter and even more to tears.

This is probably the main reason why Kṛtibās, though his book is narrative in contents, appears to be a lyric poet rather than an epic narrator, as rightly pointed out by Asit Bandyopādhyāy: "When analyzing the story of Kṛtibās' Rāmāyaṇa we can see that the poet was not able to preserve the epic swiftness of the wide and vast story of the original Rāmāyaṇa; in many places he contracted the main plot, and the wonderful grace of Vālmiki's depictions often got lost. Nevertheless there are a few stories, in his *pāñcālī*, the human grace of which may be fully enjoyed."⁴⁹ And the author enumerates ten episodes of this kind, not by chance of prevalent lyric timbre, such as Rāma's lament over the abduction of Sītā, Sītā's exile etc.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 102.

⁴⁸ J. C. GHOSH, BL, p. 36.

⁴⁹ ASITKUMĀR BANDYOPĀDHYĀY, BSI I, p. 526.

Let us illustrate, in some detail, Kṛttibās' predisposition towards lyricism by a typical sample chosen from the first canto. As a boy, Rāma goes with Lakṣmaṇa for a walk to the forests and puts the demon Marīca to flight. While the brothers are taking a rest at a lake, Kauśalyā and Daśaratha are seized with anxiety:

Not seeing Śrīrām the queen became troubled,
 And quickly went to see the king.
 The king again, not seeing Rām for a long while,
 Felt as if senseless, with no happiness in his heart.
 He took leave of everybody and went to his abode,
 Thinking: I shall find him with Kauśalyā.
 The two met on the road
 And the queen anxiously asked the king:
 Various food is prepared at home,
 Why haven't I seen Rām for such a long time?
 Daśarath said: What are you saying, O queen?
 I haven't seen Rām. Where are they gone?
 I think Rām must be at Kaikeyī's.
 Both of them ran to ask Kaikeyī.
 I did not see Śrīrām's face today,
 There is no life in me, my heart breaks.
 Kaikeyī said: I don't know anything,
 I did not see the virtuous Rām here today.
 Perhaps he forgot today and stayed somewhere.
 Where Lakṣmaṇ is, Rām will be there.
 Bharat went out with Śatrughna,
 The two brothers are strolling through the city of Ayodhyā.
 They ask all boys who used to play with him
 Where Rām may be.
 Hearing it, everybody says: Listen, king and queen,
 None of us knows where Rām and Lakṣmaṇ are.
 Kauśalyā, Sumitrā and the beautiful Kaikeyī
 Wail like a tigress who has lost her cub.
 Daśarath beats his chest and strikes his forehead.
 Where should I go to find Rām, the descendant of Raghu?
 The curse of the blind Muni has come true now,
 If I don't see Rām, I shall not remain alive.
 The fate has killed me today by the sorrow for my son,
 If I don't see Rām, death will be everywhere.
 Everybody sees darkness, though it is daylight,
 Perhaps we shall never see Śrīrām and Lakṣmaṇ again.
 Thus cried the queen for the rest of the day;
 At that time the two brothers entered Ayodhyā.
 A bow decorated with forest flowers in his left hand,
 Dancing he came with Lakṣmaṇ.
 Bharat and Śatrughna went to tell Kauśalyā:
 Look, mother, there comes Rām.
 As soon as she heard these words from them,
 The queen went out to see Śrīrām.
 Daśarath the king ran and embraced his son,
 Thousands of kisses he showered on his moon-face.
 The curse of the blind man troubles his heart.

What do I know when Providence will turn away from me ?
 Kauśalyā came running and embraced Rām,
 Kissing the lotus of his face a thousand times.
 You are the treasure of the poor, the pupil of the eye.
 Immediately a calamity would happen if I lost you.
 Bharat and Śatrughna also met Śrīrām,
 Both brothers bowed respectfully to his feet.
 Rām then feasted in his mother's house,
 Both the king and the queen became calm again.⁵⁰

This long passage, translated as literally as possible, may well illustrate the most typical features of Kṛttibās' narrative technique. He dwells at length on emotionally stirring situations; his narrative is characterized by "sweet simplicity and charm";⁵¹ the atmosphere he creates in this way is what the Bengalis call "*gharoyā ābhāwā*"—the intimate homely milieu full of love and peace; the members of the royal family are simple and straightforward people, the main virtue of whom is love for and devotion to Rāma.

Equally simple is not only Kṛttibās' verse technique but also his use of similes and metaphors, most of which belong to the common property of Bengali folk-poetry. Some of them have been used in the above specimen and the others do not differ considerably. When describing the beauty of a girl, the poet says: "Her beauty illuminates the whole city"—exactly in the same way as folk-poets of Bengal do up to the present day; "being a dwarf, why are you stretching your hand towards the moon?"—it sounds almost like an idiom.

In all respects and from all points of view, Kṛttibās' epic meets the simple listeners' predilections and taste and there was nothing to prevent it from becoming a favourite with the Bengali Hindus. Besides, as stated by Harekṛṣṇa Mukhopādhyāy, the poet was born at a time when Hindu society and religion were endangered by Islam, and in order to be preserved, they were in need of works which would help to encourage and fortify them from within: "In his Rāmāyaṇ he depicted the reflection of society which he saw in the mirror of his own heart. The Bengalis awoke anew when seeing, in the mirror of the Rāmāyaṇ, a reflection of their own soul. This is why Kṛttibās' Rāmāyaṇ became so favourite in Bengal."⁵²

As stated above, this book was far from being the only Bengali rendering of Vālmiki's epic, but it seems to be the oldest. During the subsequent centuries many other versions followed, none, however, attaining either the poetic perfection or the popularity of Kṛttibās' book. Mention, at least, must be made of the so-called Adbhut Rāmāyaṇ by Nityānanda Ācārya known as Adbhut Ācārya, dating back to the last quarter of the 17th century according to Sukumar Sen and to an earlier period in the opinion of other authors; this book seems to have ranked second after Kṛttibās in general popularity.

⁵⁰ Rāmāyaṇ, ed. cit., p. 58.

⁵¹ J. C. GHOSH, BL, p. 34.

⁵² In the Introduction to the Rāmāyaṇ, ed. cit., p. xiv.

It was obviously the identification of Rāma with the god Viṣṇu which contributed to such a wide spread of the Rāmāyaṇa not only in Bengal but also in other parts of India. In this respect, the other Sanskrit epic Mahābhārata has never equalled it. It was retold in Bengali as well, since times probably not much later than the age of Kṛtibās, but has always remained in the shade of the latter. Sukumar Sen is probably right in attributing the origin of the first Bengali versions of the Mahābhārata to the endeavours of some Muslim rulers who wished to continue the tradition of the Pāla and Sena kings to have the epic recited at their court.⁵³ At least what appears to be the first Bengali rendering of the Mahābhārata, by Paramēśvar Dās Kabīndra,⁵⁴ is closely connected with Parāgal Khān, the governor of Chittagong under the famous Husain Śāh (1493–1519) and his son Nusrat Śāh (1519–1532), and the second work of this kind, the reproduction of the Āśvamedhaparva of the Mahābhārata, by Śrīkar Nandī,⁵⁵ was composed for Parāgal's son called Chuṭi Khān. None of these works, however, could compete in popularity with Kṛtibās' Rāmāyaṇ. It was much later, in the 17th century, when Kāśīrām Dās⁵⁶ and his nephew Nandarām offered a new, naturally much shortened Bengali version of the Mahābhārata (under the title of Pāṇḍabbijay) that such a work won general popularity and esteem. Their work, up to the present day often reprinted for broad masses, is a compilation not only of Kāśīrām's and Nandarām's making but contains also parts told by Nityānanda Ghoṣ, from the second half of the 16th century; it goes however under the name of Kāśīrām ('Kāśidāsī Mahābhārat').

Once again, however, we must stress that it was the story of Rāma and Sītā which was far more popular among the masses of Bengal than the other great epic, undoubtedly due to the religious connotation of the Rāmāyaṇa. Its popularity was so great that it took hold of a part of Bengali folklore; some authors even suppose that there probably existed various folk-versions of the Rāma-story, with many deviations from the classical one. This would explain the origin of such episodes in Kṛtibās' Rāmāyaṇ and other "translations" which are to be found neither in Vālmīki nor in any non-Bengali version.

Among the genres of Bengali folk-literature in which the story of Rāma appears as one of the most frequent themes, mention must be made of the so-called *paṭuyā*-songs (*paṭuyār saṅgīt*). Their origin must be looked for in a very remote past; in the 7th-century Harṣacarita by Bāṇa (chapter IV) we read of a singer who sang of Yama, the god of death and of what awaited sinners in his hell, at the same time showing pictures of these things to his listeners. This is exactly what Bengali *paṭuyās* were doing till a few decades ago when their

⁵³ SUKUMAR SEN, HBL, p. 80.

⁵⁴ Edited by GAURĪNĀTH ŚĀSTRĪ, Calcutta.

⁵⁵ Edited by DINESCANDRA SEN and BINOD BIHĀRĪ KĀBYATĪRTHA, Calcutta 1905.

⁵⁶ There is no critical edition of the book. Much used are editions by HARAPRASĀD ŚĀSTRĪ, PŪRṆACANDRA DE, and RĀMĀNANDA CAṬṬOPĀDHYĀY (all published in Calcutta).

characteristic art died out. And it is worth mentioning that a shorter song of Yama was obviously an obligatory part of each performance even at this day.

Bengali *paṭuyās*, who belong to a special caste of *citrakārs* ('painters'), combined visual art with singing. From place to place they carried their paintings, either separate and oblong (*caukā paṭ*), or connected so as to form very long strips (*dirgha paṭ* or *jarāna paṭ*); they showed them to their audiences and "explained" each depicted scenery in simple songs of mythological contents. It was the long strip of pictures which was especially typical of their art. The singer provided it with a bamboo stick on each end, put it on a small frame and, squatting besides, gradually unwound it from the bottom to the top while singing.

In the old *paṭs* to be seen in various museums, we come very often across the story of the Rāmāyaṇa which was either reproduced in whole, but of course in a much condensed version, or in part, some episode being selected and performed. Unfortunately very few *paṭuyā*-songs had been recorded before this peculiar branch of folk-art disappeared.⁵⁷ They are composed in simple verse, often unrhymed, in extremely free metres and with frequent clichés revealing the singer's contact with his audience.

The Rāmāyaṇa songs recorded by Gurusaday Datta, six in number, are certainly not enough to allow of any definite conclusions, but they show how free the *paṭuyās* felt in dealing with their theme. In one song, only 74 lines were sufficient to retell practically the whole contents of the second and the third books of the classical versions; in another, after the statement that Rāma married Sītā, the hero simply tells his brother that they will have to leave for the forest, after which Rāma's exile follows immediately.

It is worth mentioning that both the preserved *paṭs* and the recorded songs repeat most often the same episodes which were evidently the favourite ones in this genre, especially how Daśaratha killed the son of a blind ascetic and was cursed by him, or how Rāma broke the giant bow to win the hand of Sītā.

In general, the art of *paṭuyās* remained confined to mythological themes and never developed into a true counterpart of their European, i.e. German and Czech, parallels (*Bänkelgesänge*, *kramářské písni*) in which contemporary topics and secular subjects predominated.

⁵⁷ GURUSADAY DATTA, *Paṭuyā-saṅgīt*. Calcutta 1939.

THE STORY OF LORD KRISHNA

Among the earliest Bengali works produced after the dark period, there is a free rendering of the 10th, 11th and a part of the 12th book of the Bhāgavata-purāṇa. It bears the title Śrīkṛṣṇabijay⁵⁸ (The Victory of Lord Krishna) and both its author and the time of its composition are known. It was written in 1473-80 by Mālādhara Basu, a resident of Kulingrām in Burdwan, and was obviously highly appreciated; the ruler of Gauṛ bestowed the title of Guṇarāj Khān to its author and the book became, a few years later, one of the favourites of the great Caitanya.

However high its appraisal, at the time of its composition, and its historical value, the Śrīkṛṣṇabijay does not rank with the great mediaeval Bengali poems. Mālādhara Basu was more a devoted *bhakta* than a great poet. His book is rather dull when read as poetry and does not excel in any particular respect. Its weakness becomes obvious if it is compared with another book treating essentially the same subject and written probably in the same space of time, the Śrīkṛṣṇakīrtan by Baṛu Caṇḍīdās.

The name of Baṛu Caṇḍīdās has always been well known in Bengal. Until 1911, however, it was connected exclusively with lyrical stanzas (*padas*) sung in honour of the god Krishna and glorifying his godly deeds and especially his love with Rādhā—isolated strophes which will be dealt with in one of the following chapters. In 1911, Basantarañjan Rāy bought, on behalf of the Baṅgīya Sāhitya Paṇīṣad (Society of Bengali Literature), a manuscript of an epic work written by this poet and imparted information about his discovery in the magazine of this Society. The manuscript was found two years before in the village Kankilya near Balabishnupur and its publication, in 1916, opened a new chapter in the history of Bengali literature.

The manuscript is rather badly preserved. Apart from a number of leaves here and there, both the beginning and the end of the book are missing. Thus not even the original title of the work has survived. The title of Śrīkṛṣṇakīrtan was given to it by the discoverer and editor, Basantarañjan Rāy. The name of the author, Baṛu Caṇḍīdās, appears in all colophons and leaves no doubt about his authorship. Who, however, was this Baṛu Caṇḍīdās? When did he live? Was he identical with the author of the lyrical *padas* preserved under his name? These and many other questions have become a subject of various controversies and even today, problems connected with the work and its author are far from being definitely solved. Though nobody believes that all songs going under the name of Baṛu Caṇḍīdās were really composed by a single person, some scholars are convinced that some of them are compositions by the same poet who wrote the Śrīkṛṣṇabijay, whereas others doubt it. We shall return to the problem of Caṇḍīdās the *padakartā* in another chapter.

⁵⁸ Edited by NANDALĀL BIDYĀSĀGAR, Dacca 1945, and by KHAGENDRANĀTH MITRA, Calcutta.

Apart from the *caryās*, the manuscript found by Basantarañjan Rāy is undoubtedly the oldest Bengali manuscript available. Its language is very archaic and of immense value for tracing the development of Bengali.⁵⁹ In general, Bengali scholars agree that it should be dated back to the 16th century, if not later; the work itself, however, is probably older.

It is not surprising that Caitanya who so highly appraised Mālādhār Basu's Śrīkṛṣṇabijay, never even mentioned the Śrīkṛṣṇakīrtan, although he was very fond of Caṇḍidās' lyrical songs. The Śrīkṛṣṇakīrtan is quite different from the Krishnaite *bhakti* poetry, as represented by lyrical *padas*, and from the religious *bhakti* conception, as propounded by Caitanya. (This may be one of the reasons why the identity of the two "Baṇu Caṇḍidās" appears so dubious.) On the other hand, it can be doubted if such a work could have been composed after Caitanya, without being attacked by Caitanya's followers. Adding the general atmosphere of the composition, its verse technique and language, we may place the book into the 15th century as the most probable time of its origin.

The Śrīkṛṣṇakīrtan thus appears to be the earliest original epic poem composed in Bengali. Though elaborating a subject treated in many Sanskrit works, such as the Bhāgavatapurāṇa, Jayadeva's immortal Gītagovinda etc. which Caṇḍidās was obviously well acquainted with, both the author's approach and his poetic method are independent of any of these predecessors.

The book—almost 8,500 lines have been preserved—is divided into ten parts (*khaṇḍa*). The first (Janmakhaṇḍa), by far the shortest of all, describes how Viṣṇu was requested by other gods to appear on earth again in order to kill the bad Kansa; how he was born as Krishna and carried to the house of Nanda so that Kansa might not kill him; how he defeated all the demons sent by Kansa; how Lakṣmī was born as Rādhā and married to Āiḥan. The second part (Tāmbulkhaṇḍa) tells of Krishna's infatuation by the beauty of Rādhā; through the help of Baṇāi, her grandmother, Krishna seeks to win her love, sends her various gifts and a message of love, but Rādhā sharply refutes him. The third volume (Dāṅkhaṇḍa), with its 2,300 verses the longest part of the work, contains a detailed depiction of the first endeavours of Krishna to seduce Rādhā. He pretends to be a tax-collector and asks her either to pay a heavy tax or to give him her love. He uses various methods, from threats to entreaties and flatteries, but everything is in vain. Rādhā refuses him, stressing her tender age (she is only twelve), inexperience and especially the fact that she is a married woman. At the end of a very long conversation, Krishna wins Rādhā's body, but not her heart.

In the fourth part (Naukākhaṇḍa), Krishna invents another plot to make Rādhā love him again. He runs a ferry-boat on the river Jamuna, but such a small one that girls going to the market of Mathurā have to be taken across one after another. When Rādhā is in the boat, Krishna wrecks it, "helps" her to

⁵⁹ It was thoroughly analysed by SUNITIKUMAR CHATTERJI in his monumental work, *The Origin and Development of the Bengali Language*. Calcutta 1926.

reach the other bank and gets his sweet reward. The fifth chapter (Bhārkhaṇḍa, with the appendix Chatrakhaṇḍa) represents him as a porter, helping Rādhā to carry her goods to the market and then holding his umbrella over her head, in order to achieve his amorous goal. The resistance of Rādhā gets weaker and in the sixth part (Bṛndābankhaṇḍa) we find her in love with Krishna. He persuades Baṛāi to bring Rādhā along with the other "sixteen thousand milkmaids" to his forest full of flowers and fruits and sports with all the girls. Rādhā becomes jealous, accuses him of treason, but at the end declares her love for him and their first true union ensues. The seventh book (Yamunākhaṇḍa, with Kāliya-damankhaṇḍa and Hārkhaṇḍa appended) describes Krishna's amorous plays with *gopīs* in the river, after he had defeated the black serpent Kāliya, and narrates the well-known episode of how Krishna took away the robes of the girls while they were bathing in the Jamuna. He returned them afterwards but kept a necklace of Rādhā. The story is not fully intelligible because of some pages missing, but Rādhā obviously complained to Krishna's mother of the behaviour of her son and made Krishna angry.

Wanting to take his revenge for her complaint and all the sorrows she had caused him, Krishna decides, in the eighth part (Bāṅkhaṇḍa), to kill Rādhā with a "flowery arrow of love" and, helped by Baṛāi, performs the deed. When Rādhā falls unconscious, Krishna feels remorse for his deed, begs Rādhā to awake again and a happy reconciliation concludes this episode. The ninth chapter (Baṁśīkhaṇḍa) presents a changed situation. Rādhā is now hopelessly in love with Krishna, but his interest in her has already faded. He tortures her constantly by playing his enchanting flute, but never coming to see her. She therefore steals his flute and gives it back only after much entreaty and a promise that he will love her again.

The last part (Rādhābiraha) is all tuned to the sorrow of Rādhā abandoned by Krishna who does not care for her any more. She begs Baṛāi to bring him back, looks for him everywhere, is refuted by him, succeeds in persuading him to love her once again, but is then definitely abandoned. The final pages of the manuscript are missing, but there can be no doubt about the sorrowful conclusion of the book.

Baru Caṇḍidās' Śrīkṛṣṇakīrtan is in many a respect a unique work. In comparison with the corresponding books of the Bhāgavatapurāṇa that treat the same subject, on the one hand, and Jayadeva's Gītagovinda, on the other, it reveals a number of deviations and novelties which may be due to folk-tradition, but may as well have been invented by Baru Caṇḍidās himself. First of all, the general conception of the main characters is different. There is no doubt about the divinity of Lord Krishna, he himself often reminds Baṛāi, Rādhā and the reader of his actual identity, and yet his character as depicted by the author of the Śrīkṛṣṇakīrtan is rather dubious, to say the least. His behaviour towards Rādhā does not show him in a very favourable light. He uses rather mean tricks to make Rādhā love him, and after he has reached his goal, he abandons her altogether.

It is Rādhā who is the real heroine of the book. She is nothing else but a little girl of twelve, at the beginning of the story, shy, obedient, but well-aware of her position as a married woman and her duties. She exercises all her weak powers to resist the seducer, desperately trying to save her honesty and not to infringe traditional rules and standards. She cannot win this unequal fight, of course, and eventually succumbs, her resistance being turned into a true and soulful love. She was witty, when parrying all the arguments of the attacking Krishna; she is now simple and unpretentious, when confessing her love. But even then, she retains her womanly pride and is willing to rip the love out of her heart, when Krishna sports with other girls. The cruel lover, however, leads her to the final humiliation—and then runs away. Her sorrow is moving and pathetic.

As rightly pointed out by Asit Bandyopādhyāy,⁶⁰ Rādhā is the only character of the book which is presented in its full development. She is a “novel-heroine,” in the full sense of the word, presented as passing through the individual stages of the development of her feelings towards Krishna, and changing, at the same time, from an unconscious little village girl into a woman of character, rich inner life and dignity. Not a single deed and word of hers detracts from her individuality and personality.

The third main character of the book, old Barāi, is new, too. It is through her that the majority of dialogues between Krishna and Rādhā are carried on, without her help the action would not evolve. As a go-between, she plays her role well, but does not forget her own interests, taking revenge on Rādhā who, at first, beat her for help to Krishna, and feeling genuinely sorry for the girl at the end. As put by Sukumar Sen, “she is never merely a droll figure nor always a bad old lady.”⁶¹ In short, she is a very human character.

In general one may agree with Alokrañjan Dāsgupta and Debīprasād Bandyopādhyāy in their suggestion⁶² that the Śrīkṛṣṇakīrtan ranks, in its conception, among the *maṅgal-kāvyas* which will be treated in the next chapter. Like the goddesses of these works, Krishna does his best to win over an unwilling human being and makes her, in this case, not worship but love him. More than this, however, the peculiar conception of the deity must in my opinion be stressed, which is so characteristic of the *maṅgal-kāvyas*. As in the latter, the methods of the god in question are not above moral reproach. Being a god, he must win, of course, but it is the defeated human being which is the real hero of the story. We shall have ample opportunity to discuss this peculiar feature of this kind of literature in the next chapter.

Though dealing with a mythological subject, Barū Caṇḍīdās created, in his Śrīkṛṣṇakīrtan, a fully human story of the beginning, evolution and end of a love. This fact is stressed by his way of describing, for instance, the physical

⁶⁰ ASITKUMĀR BANDYOPĀDHYĀY, BSI I, pp. 322–6.

⁶¹ SUKUMAR SEN, HBL, p. 77.

⁶² BSR, p. 113.

beauty of Rādhā and especially several love scenes pictured without inhibition and restraint. The poet is not interested in the heroic and divine deeds of Lord Krishna. He prefers letting Krishna speak of them to depicting them at length, and if he cannot avoid the latter, he skips over these facts with an almost superficial haste. Thus in the 5th song of the 1st part, after Kansa has killed a girl instead of Krishna, the girl tells him:

A boy grows up in the house of Nanda to kill you.
When Kansa heard it, he decided to kill Krishna.
First he appointed Putnā,
Krishna killed her by pretending to suck her breasts.
Then (Kansa) sent Yamal and Ārjun,
With a single blow Krishna broke them.
Next (Kansa) sent Keśi and other demons—
All of them Krishna killed in a terrible fight.
Thus Dāmodar grows up in Gokul.⁶³

The only heroic scene depicted in full is that of how Krishna defeated the serpent Kāliya, but even here not much space is devoted to the event and no noteworthy poetic skill exercised. In contrast with it, the poet makes use of all his talents in the long dialogues between Krishna and Rādhā; some of these portions rank among the best in the old Bengali literature. When playing the role of a tax-collector, Krishna asks Rādhā who is unwilling to embrace him to pay a heavy tax and enumerates all her physical charms, counting how much she has to pay for each. In the same part, when seducing Rādhā, Krishna sings a song, almost all lines starting with *kāla* (black), which is his own colour. Rādhā parries:

Black Krishna, don't treat me with contempt,
blinded with desire as you are, you do not see the way.
Black is your body, Krishna, black is your heart,
you rob everybody on the road, pretending to collect tax.⁶⁴

Many beautiful images, similes and metaphors are inserted to describe the beauty of Rādhā or to express the emotions of love and sorrow. Baṛu Caṇḍīdās does not avoid using traditional similes (e.g. "I am no bird so that I might fly to you," IX, 2, 13, etc.), but more often either transforms them in an original way, or uses other ones that are reminiscent of the best samples of Sanskrit lyrics. Above all, however, the deep psychological insight of Caṇḍīdās must be underlined, his ability to find the right word at the right place and thus to turn the stereotyped characters of an old myth into human beings full of life and emotions.

Do not hold my robe, Krishna, my body trembles in fear;
Do you not know that I am a child not knowing physical love?

⁶³ Śrīkṛṣṇakīrtan Caṇḍīdās-biracita, ed. by BASANTARANJAN RĀY. Calcutta, 5th Ed. 1954, pp. 2-3.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 37.

I see myself as a little girl, Krishna;
 No juice is obtained, if an unripe fruit is pressed.
 Leave me alone, Krishna, let me go to Mathurā,
 A flowery boat, Krishna, is unable to carry a load.
 A bud of mālātī and mallikā has no scent,
 Knowing it, give up your intentions with me, Krishna.
 There is no juice in a pomegranate,
 Unless it becomes properly ripe inside.
 I shall tell you one thing, listen, you silly one:
 Boiled milk tastes well after it has cooled down.
 One should not drink hot milk, Krishna,
 One should not eat with both hands when hungry.
 You do not know me at all, I am very young,
 Therefore give up your hope, O God Banamālī.
 Excuse me and go home, O God Gadādhara.
 So sings Bara Caṇḍīdās, the servant of Bāsālī.⁶⁵

Each part of the Śrīkṛṣṇakīrtan consists of a number of such songs concluded by a stereotyped colophon. The poems are unequal in length, but most of the preserved 411 songs tend towards an eighteen-lines structure, with simple rhymes, not infrequently grammatical. Second in frequency are *tripadīs*, but there are even instances of a three-lines structure with a common rhyme. Occasional changes in rhythm and verse structure break the monotony of the composition, so typical of the majority of old Bengali epics.

In some places, connective verses—two or four in number—in Sanskrit language and metres are inserted to help the reader understand who speaks in the next song. This technique reminds us of Jayadeva's Gītagovinda, but there is much difference between the two. Whereas in the Gītagovinda, the connective verses provide a necessary explanation and thus form an integral part of the book (not to speak of the fact that they do not differ from the songs in the language used), in the Śrīkṛṣṇakīrtan they appear superfluous and are not necessary for the understanding of the songs: the reader would seldom be in uncertainty as to who is the speaker in this or that song, even without reading these insertions. This is true to such an extent (not to speak of the fact that Sanskrit is used here) that one has to ask oneself whether these insertions are not a later interpolation.

As an epic, the Śrīkṛṣṇakīrtan seems to have no continuation in Bengali literature and to be an isolated phenomenon in its history. On the other hand, it probably helped to set the basic tone for many *padās*, isolated stanzas on the love of Krishna and Rādhā, made by the next generations of Bengali poets. Though void of the feeling of devotion (*bhakti*) towards Krishna, which so strongly dominates this creation, it probably inspired many poets in their descriptions of the love between the couple. We have even a positive proof of the fact that this work was not altogether forgotten, after Caitanya, or even despised. In 1932, Manīndramohan Basu found two copies of a later work dealing with music, *rāgas* etc. As illustrations, ten songs of the Śrīkṛṣṇakīrtan are given

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 47.

in it, "which proves that as late as one hundred years ago, the Śrīkṛṣṇakīrtan was not forgotten."⁶⁶

"Baḍu Caṇḍidās's poem is the nearest approach to dramatic poetry in Middle Bengali literature,"⁶⁷ states Sukumar Sen; other scholars stress the "theatrical" (*nāṭakīya*) conception and composition of the book. As a matter of fact, the subject of the Krishna-Rādhā story and its traditional way of presentation, in dialogues and songs, literally calls for a theatrical performance. No wonder, therefore, that this subject not only appeared on the stage, in the 19th century, as a compromise between the modern drama and a traditional presentation, but was also often connected with the rise of the well-known Bengali form of folk-theatre, the *yātrā*.⁶⁸

The *yātrā* is obviously very old and has remained a living folk-theatre form in both West Bengal and Bangladesh till today. Its characteristic features are the combination of songs and dialogues, preference to highly emotional or even sentimental subjects or episodes, no use of paraphernalia, and colourful costumes of the actors, usually men even in female parts. Traditional mythological subjects point to the original connection of the *yātrā* with religious festivals, in a similar way as the Hindi *rāslīlā* is still connected with the celebration of Krishna's birthday in Mathurā. Nowadays secular subjects, such as semi-historical and pseudohistorical romances prevail, but mythological themes still retain their position.

The *yātrā* is performed either by professional groups or amateurs and may be found in the largest cities as well as in villages. It is usually staged on a platform surrounded by sitting audiences and the performance is very long, often taking up the major part of the night. Even in plays with secular subjects, the traditional *bandanā* or opening prayer to the gods is retained. Small groups of musicians are appointed to accompany the songs, to attract the audience before the beginning, or to play during occasional dance intermezzos.

The necessity of providing actors for the female parts of *yātrās* gave rise to a peculiar custom, in certain regions of what nowadays is Bangladesh. Little boys were selected and prepared for this career already in tender age; they had to learn how to wear a *sāri*, make graceful feminine movements and gestures and sing like women. Besides appearing in *yātrās*, these boys called *ghāṭu* also danced and sang special songs, the so-called *ghāṭu-gān*. And it is certainly not without interest that the contents of these songs as preserved up to the present day, for instance in the Mymensingh District of Bangladesh, are exclusively derived from the Krishna-Rādhā story.

The Krishna-*yātrā* cannot be said to be based on Baḍu Caṇḍidās' Śrīkṛṣṇakīrtan, of course. In its traditional conception of the theme, however, it has much in common with it. One detail is worth mentioning, too; in both the Śrī-

⁶⁶ ASITKUMĀR BANDYOPĀDHYĀY, BSI I, p. 290.

⁶⁷ SUKUMAR SEN, HBL, p. 76.

⁶⁸ NISHIKANTA CHATTERJEE, *The Yatras or the Popular Dramas of Bengal*, London 1882.

kṛṣṇakīrtan and the Krishna-*yātrā*, the sage Nārada is presented as a comic character, in sharp contrast to the classical conception of this great sage, who appears so often in Hindu mythology.

The *yātrā* is far from being the only genre of Bengali folk-poetry in which the Krishna-Rādhā subject is treated. We shall mention some other genres and forms when we come to discuss the Krishnaite *padas* of the post-Caitanya period.

GLORIFICATIONS OF GODDESSES

Though various doubts concerning the authenticity and the reliability of the respective colophons have been raised, two works claim to have been written in Bengali in the last decade of the 15th century, both of them treating the same subject: Bijay Gupta's *Padmāpurāṇ*, in 1494, and Bipradās' *Manasābijay*, in 1495. At approximately the same time, yet another epic poem on the same theme seems to have been produced, the *Padmāpurāṇ* by Nārāyaṇdeb. Obviously none of these three authors was the original creator of the story they recount in their books, about how the snake goddess *Manasā* was born, how she consolidated her position among the traditional Hindu gods and how she finally started to be worshipped by human beings. There is no doubt that this story is of much older origin, that it had existed and circulated among the villagers of Bengal until it reached the level of literature and became one of the favourite subjects of mediaeval Bengali poets, to be elaborated in numerous versions. The same is true of the other branches of the so-called *maṅgalkāvyas*—the myths and legends on the goddess *Caṇḍī*, the god *Dharma* and the Great *Nāths*. Along with books composed to glorify some “minor” deities (*Śītalā*, *Ṣaṣṭhī*, *Rāy*, *Sāradā* etc.) along the same lines, these *maṅgalkāvyas* represent not only the main bulk of Middle Bengali epic poetry, but form also its most original and autochthonous part.

Though not always containing the word *maṅgal* in their titles, they all form a homogeneous genre. Invariably the name of the deity to be glorified is given, followed in most cases either by the term *maṅgal* or by *bijay*. The former word, meaning in Bengali “bliss, welfare, prosperity,” probably indicated the benefit the listeners were to gain by listening to these compositions, whereas the term *bijay* (“victory, conquest, triumph”) expressed the most essential point of the main story.

In order to make these points clear without much theorizing, I shall sum up the contents of the most popular of these *maṅgalkāvyas*, the story of *Manasā*, as told by Bipradās:

I. The gods celebrating the defeat of the demons asked the sage *Śāntanu* to let his wife *Gaṅgā* cook their meals. *Gaṅgā* was not able to return home in time, as required by *Śāntanu*, and *Śiva* had to keep her in his house. In order to see the god *Dharma*, *Śiva* practised penance and was not at home when *Dharma* arrived there. *Gaṅgā* saw him instead and turned white. *Dharma* left a message for *Śiva*: If he was not satisfied with the sight of *Gaṅgā*, he should go to *Kālidaha* where he would see him in the form of a beautiful girl. *Śiva* started going to *Kālidaha* every day. His wife *Caṇḍī* whom he refused to take along suspected him of some love affair, and followed him disguised as a *Ḍom* girl. *Śiva* did not recognize her and seduced her, after which she revealed her identity. *Śiva*, ashamed took his revenge. In the disguise of an old man he offered to repair her bodice and made *Caṇḍī* love him in return. *Śiva* continued visiting *Kālidaha*, and in amorous mood once spilled his seed which ran down the stalk of a lotus to the underworld kingdom of snakes. The mother of *Vāsuki* made a statue of a beautiful girl of it, naming her *Manasā*; she was accepted by *Vāsuki* as his own sister and

made queen of snakes. With them she went to Kālidaha where Śiva saw her and fell in love with her. She let him recognize his own daughter in her and asked him to take her to his house. Afraid of his jealous wife, Śiva hid her in a flower basket, but Caṇḍī found her and a violent row started. Caṇḍī did not believe Manasā's story and wounded the girl who in return killed her by the sight of her eye full of poison. At Śiva's request she revived her step-mother again, but had to leave the house anyway. Śiva abandoned her when she fell asleep under a tree.

II. Manasā had a palace built on the Sijuyā Hill. In the meantime Manorath, a calf of the divine cow Kapilā, drank up all water of the celestial Ballukā whereupon Śiva asked Kapilā to refill the sea. She did it with her milk. As the result of a sage's curse, Lakṣmī left the god Indra and hid under this sea. The gods decided to churn the milk-sea, with the mountain Māṇḍār as the churning stick and the snake Vāsuki as the rope. Demons took also part in this work and the sea was forced to give up not only Lakṣmī, but also a number of other gifts including Dhanvantari with a cup of *amṛta* (the drink of immortality) in his hand. Dhanvantari was made the best poison doctor and the gods divided the *amṛta* among themselves.

III. Śiva did not like the demons being cheated of their share of the *amṛta*, and on his insistence, another churning of the sea took place. This time, however, only poison appeared threatening to destroy everything. Śiva had to swallow it and fell down lifeless. Caṇḍī called Manasā to help her father, but another row and fight between the two goddesses arose and Manasā killed Caṇḍī again. Then she revived Śiva and on his request his wife too. Śiva decided to marry off Manasā and persuaded the sage Jaratkāru to become her husband. To humiliate her, Caṇḍī advised Manasā to wear an ornament of living snakes during her bridal night and the snakes terrified Jaratkāru so much that he flew away and hid in a conch under the sea. Disguised as an osprey, Śiva brought him back and Jaratkāru was not allowed to leave again before he begot a son with his wife. The son Astik was born.

IV. Janmejaya, wanting to revenge the death of his father Parikṣit, started to destroy all snakes who were eventually rescued by Astik sent by Manasā. The rich merchant and king of Campaknagar Cāṇḍo was a devoted follower of Śiva and Caṇḍī who gave him, in reward for his austerities, the *mahājñān* (Great Wisdom) bringing immortality. He was, however, selected by Manasā to become her worshipper as the goddess had to make also human beings recognize and worship her. With her companion Neto Manasā visited the human world. First she compelled a group of cowherds to bow to her feet, by threatening to drown their cows, and taught them how to bring her offerings and worship her in the form of a sacred pot. Her next target were the Muslim inhabitants of the area, especially the brothers Hāsan and Husen. The latter was killed by snakes along with all the other Muslims except the chief Hāsan who was thus forced to worship the powerful goddess.

V. Jālu and Mālu, two fishermen brothers, became the next worshippers of Manasā who blessed them with prosperity. From them, Cāṇḍo's wife Sanakā learned how to worship the snake goddess and did it, but Cāṇḍo destroyed Manasā's sacred pot. Manasā knew that she could not conquer Cāṇḍo unless she succeeded to take his *mahājñān* away from him. Disguised as Sanakā's beautiful sister, she visited his house and enchanted Cāṇḍo so that he was willing to reveal his secret knowledge in exchange for her embrace. Then she disappeared leaving Cāṇḍo helpless.

VI. In a dream, Cāṇḍo saw Manasā threatening to destroy him, unless he became her follower. Cāṇḍo appointed the great poison doctor Dhanvantari to

protect him against the snakes of the goddess and Manasā had to defeat him first, in order to get to Cāndo.

VII. Then she removed also the main disciples of the poison doctor, Dhanā and Manā; but Cāndo still did not submit and scolded her instead.

VIII. Manasā sent one of her snakes to kill Cāndo's six sons. The snake Kālī did it by poisoning their rice. Even this cruel blow, however, did not bend Cāndo who let their dead bodies be placed on crates and set adrift on the river. Manasā took hold of them and kept them. The goddess then made the god Indra lend her his dancers Aniruddha and Uṣā. The former was to be reborn as another son of Cāndo and the latter as Behulā to become his wife. Cāndo set for a long voyage, with many ships and goods.

IX. Cāndo visited Trivenī and many other places, till he reached Anupām, the goal of his journey. There he waited for Śiva to give him the *mahājñān* again, as promised in a dream. He had no idea that the dream was only a trick played by Manasā.

X. In Campaknagar, a son Lakhāi (Lakhindar) was born to Sanakā; at the same time, the girl Behulā was given birth in Ujāni. Then Manasā made Cāndo return home and destroyed all his ships in a storm. The poor man was cast ashore, naked and helpless. After years of much humiliation and suffering caused by Manasā, he turned homeward.

XI. Only Sanakā recognized her poor husband in his pitiful state. Cāndo decided to marry Lakhāi and the marriage between him and Behulā was arranged. It was known, however, that Lakhāi was to die of snakebite in his wedding night. Cāndo therefore started to build a house of iron for his son's protection.

XII. Manasā forced the architect of the iron house to leave a tiny hole in its wall. The marriage was celebrated with much pomp and the pair retired to the iron house. The snake Kālī sent by Manasā entered it and bit Lakhāi who instantly died. Behulā asked his parents to put his dead body on a raft; she would go with it to Manasā and ask her to revive her husband. Cāndo and Sanakā tried in vain to dissuade her from her intention, but had finally to agree. It was a long journey, full of danger and difficulties. She had to escape many men wanting to stop her; vultures and a tiger wished to devour the decomposed body; robbers tried to kill her. At last, the raft reached Caumukhā where Behulā was being awaited by Neto, on Manasā's order, and brought to the city of gods. Behulā enchanted the gods by her dance and moved them by her story. Śiva summoned Manasā who first denied what she had been accused of. Behulā, however, proved her story to be true and Manasā complained, in the form of a *bāromāsi*,⁶⁹ how Cāndo constantly insulted and ridiculed her. After Behulā promised to make her father-in-law worship the snake goddess, the latter revived Lakhāi as well as his six brothers.

XIII. On their journey back home, Behulā asked Manasā to restore also all the ships of Cāndo she had wrecked and Lakhāi took revenge on everybody who had hindered his wife during her trip to the city of gods. After they appeared at Cāndo's house, everybody supported Behulā's entreaty that Cāndo should worship Manasā. Even then Cāndo had a condition—his ships had to float on land up to his house. After Manasā had done it with the help of her snakes, Cāndo worshipped her golden pot and Manasā appeared in all her divine splendour. Behulā and Lakhāi paid the last visit to the parents of the devoted wife and were taken back to heaven.

⁶⁹ See pp. 136–139.

The story has been retold at some length and details in order to show not only its remarkably rich and phantastic fabula (even so a large number of episodes had to be left out), but also the typical way of unfolding the plot. In all versions, almost invariably the birth of the goddess is narrated, followed by a number of myths of purāṇic as well as non-purāṇic origin which recount in which way Manasā tried to establish her power to the other gods and thus won a place among them. This, however, is not enough. A deity is to be worshipped by men, too, and this is obviously not easy to achieve, especially where men of the higher strata of society are concerned. They have to be persuaded by all accessible means, irrespective of their moral quality. It is, however, an unequal fight and man has to submit, at the end, unable to cope with the divine powers of the goddess.

There are gods and there are men, in these epics, all mixed together to such an extent that the borderline between the two worlds, as well as between phantasy and reality, often vanishes altogether. Everything is possible in this peculiar world, any wonder may be achieved not only by gods, but also by sages and people possessing the Great Knowledge. The poets of the *maṅgalkāvyas* do not feel hampered by considerations of possibility and probability and it is here that their creative imagination finds ample room for its full expanse. People—and even gods—are killed and revive again, sages take refuge in conches under the sea, rivers flow in any direction you wish (how else could Behulā return on a raft by the same way which she took when going with the dead body of Lakhindar to the seat of gods?), a destroyed plantation is restored in a moment, etc.

The most characteristic feature of Bengali *maṅgalkāvyas*, and the most peculiar one, at the same time, is the way in which gods and men are contrasted with each other, in respect of morals. However mighty and omnipotent the divine being may be, there is certainly nothing to admire in his or her “private life” and behaviour. Śiva is almost a debauchee unable to see a handsome female without being sexually aroused; even his own daughter incites the same desire in him; he abandons her alone in the forest in order to avoid the anger of his wife; though Cāndo is his ardent devotee, he does not move his little finger to protect him from anything Manasā has inflicted upon him. Śiva’s consort Caṇḍī is a spiteful and revengeful woman, spying on her divine husband, losing her head in fits of fury, playing dirty tricks on her step-daughter, but also letting herself be seduced by an old man, not knowing he is her own husband in disguise. Manasā, then, is perhaps the worst of all. In order to achieve her aim, i.e. to be worshipped, she does not hesitate to use any means, however mean and cheap, to break her opponents. It is her *bijay*, her victory, no doubt, which is described in a more or less convincing way in the *Manasāmaṅgal*, but certainly not a victory in the ethic sense of the term. The listener may feel fear of her, even awe sometimes, he may pity her at some places, but never is love and sympathetic admiration towards her incited in him. Her victory is a victory of mere power and terror, not of moral superiority and goodness. She has an army of the most horrible beings, poisonous snakes, at her disposal, and one has to conciliate her so that she does not direct her wrath against oneself. There is no need to

have any illusions about her loyalty towards her own devotees; why, Sanakā, the wife of Cāndo, had been one of her true followers since early days, and yet Manasā did not spare the poor mother all those sorrows, whenever it befitted her interests.

What a difference between this conception of gods and that of classical Sanskrit mythology! The influence of the *purāṇas* on the *maṅgalkābyas* is obvious and undeniable, the same myths are often treated by both of them—but the characters of gods are very different. This difference is ascribed to the non-Aryan origin of *maṅgalkābyas*. Thus Āśuṭoṣ Bhaṭṭācārya says in his excellent monograph on this branch of Bengali literature: “Before the Aryan civilization had been established in Bengal, there were religions among ordinary people, indications of which may be found in the *maṅgalkābyas*. Many are of the opinion that fear is one of the original traits of human mind, and that it was from fear that the idea of gods had developed first, in the childhood of human civilization. The oldest Bengali conception of gods, too, arose from this instinct of the original praehistoric society of this country. The lower society of the *maṅgalkābyas* was unable, because of its narrow-minded limitations, to appreciate the ideal of merciful and benefactory deities conceived by the advanced Aryan society. Therefore the gods of the *maṅgalkābyas* are low, selfish, cruel, revengeful, ungrateful and deceitful. The devotee never bows to them in reverence and devotion voluntarily, nobody takes refuge with them, attracted by their greatness; people pronounce their names only out of fear, in order to protect themselves against their groundless persecution.”⁷⁰

Whatever the reasons of this peculiar conception may be, the gods of the *maṅgalkābyas* stand so to say high above the criteria of good and evil, above any moral judgement. The only thing they ask from men and enforce by all means is to be recognized as gods, to be given offerings and to be worshipped.

In sharp contrast to them are depicted the main characters of men and women, the true heroes and heroines of these epics. They are human and weak, almost helpless and unprotected when confronted with the irresistible power of the deities. And yet they live their lives, clinging to their principles which are, first of all, moral principles of right, goodness and justice. The merchant-king Cāndo may be taken as a typical example. He is Śiva's follower and despises Manasā, not only refusing to worship her, but even scolding her, destroying her sacred pots and forbidding her worship in his family. Even when confronted with her power, he does not yield easily. All his property has been destroyed, his six sons killed and he himself almost drowned; and yet when Manasā offers him a pillow and then a raft to save his life in the stormy sea, he refuses this mercy and prefers to remain true to his principles. He is human all right, has fits of bad temper, is a stubborn person and no idealized hero, but his honour, self-respect and fidelity make him one of the greatest characters of mediaeval Bengali literature. Even when forced to worship Manasā, at the end, he does it with an averted face and using his left hand.

⁷⁰ ĀŚUṬOṢ BHAṬṬĀCĀRYA, BMI, pp. 8–9.

Another true hero of the story is Behulā, the devoted wife of Lakhindar. Nobody can persuade her to desist from doing her utmost to bring her husband back to life, even though it means hardship and sorrow at the very verge of what can be endured. She need not do it, both her own family and her parents-in-law try to make her stay at home, in comfort and security; but she is the very model of the highest female and wifely virtue and goes. No wonder that with these characters so well depicted, the story of Cāndo, Behulā and Lakhindar won so much popularity among the masses of their Bengali countrymen and has not lost much of it even in modern times.

In short, *maṅgalkābyas* are "songs of victory" of this or that deity, but they are, at the same time, glorifications of man, of human beings who, in spite of all fairy-tale incidents related, stand with both feet firmly on the ground which is unmistakably the soil of Bengal.⁷¹

We have spoken about these characters at such length not only because they form the most characteristic and valuable element of the *maṅgalkābyas*, but also because they are the main criterion to judge and evaluate the individual versions of the *Manasāmaṅgal*. The story is given and so is the form, the simple narrative in the *payār* verse. The poets may add an episode here and there, they may elaborate this or that scenery more thoroughly, using better similes and metaphors. But the ultimate test of their poetic skill is the ingenuity with which they draw the portraits of their heroes and heroines, the depth of their psychological insight and the way they turn these figures into living beings of flesh and blood.

The authors of the three *maṅgals* retelling the story of *Manasā* and being the oldest preserved versions of the work have been mentioned already—Bijay Gupta, Bipradās and Nārāyaṇdeb. At the present stage of research, it is impossible to decide with certainty who among them was the earliest. No date is mentioned in Nārāyaṇdeb's version and the years given in the colophons of Bijay Gupta and Bipradās have been subject to many doubts and suspicions.

Bijay Gupta, a Vaidya by caste from the village Phullaśrī (nowadays Gailā) in the Barisal District of Bangladesh, called his work *Padmāpurāṇ*,⁷² as did the majority of Eastern Bengali poets. He left a colophon stating that his book was written in 1484, when Sultan Husen Śāh ruled the country. But Husen Śāh did not become king of Gaur before 1493. On the strength of this discrepancy and some other circumstances, Sukumar Sen refuted the colophon as "not genuine" and was not willing to go earlier than the 16th century as the probable time of the composition of the book.⁷³ Āśutoṣ Bhaṭṭācārya,⁷⁴ on the other hand, considers the discrepancy to be the result of a scribe's error and with a rather

⁷¹ KṢETRA GUPTA, *Prācīn kābye saundarya jijñāsā o naba mūlyāyan*. Calcutta 1959, pp. 13–4.

⁷² Edited, for the first time, by PYĀRIMOHAṆ DĀSGUPTA, Barishal 1896 (reprinted Calcutta 1930).

⁷³ *Vipradāsa's Manasā-vijaya*, ed. by SUKUMAR SEN. Calcutta 1953, p. xix.

⁷⁴ ĀŚUTOṢ BHAṬṬĀCĀRYA, BMI, pp. 238–9.

plausible correction sets the date of Bijay Gupta's *Padmāpurāṇ* in 1494; this date has been accepted by the majority of Bengali scholars. According to his own statement, Bijay Gupta had only one predecessor in the field, a certain Haridatta, whose composition was so bad that it did not survive even till Bijay Gupta's time. In the latter's work, this is stated by Manasā herself who appears before Bijay Gupta in a dream asking the poet to compose a song in her praise. A few verses of this incident deserve to be quoted, being the earliest instance of literary criticism in mediaeval Bengali literature:

Fools have composed songs, not knowing (my) glory,
 Kānā (i.e. the One-eyed) Haridatta was the first to compose such a song.
 All songs by Haridatta have been lost during the time,
 Deceived by me (?), he did not create any (good) verse-couplet.
 There is no logic of words, there is no sweetness (in him),
 Wanting to sing one thing he sings another and there is no rhyme.
 His song is unintelligible, instead of "lāph" he says "phāl."
 Seeing and hearing it, disharmony arises in me.⁷⁵

Nothing but a few verses have been preserved under the name of Haridatta, but the above-given statement may indicate that he belonged to that older stage in the development of the *Manasāmaṅgal* when the theme had not yet been raised to the literary level, but formed a branch of folk-poetry.

Bijay Gupta's version gained immense popularity and esteem testified to by the high number of manuscripts preserved. It is a remarkable work. "There is no trace of anything godlike" in his gods and goddesses, says Āśutoṣ Bhaṭṭācārya,⁷⁶ but this is in full accord with the conception analysed above. On the other hand, his human heroes and heroines are living beings, fully capable of winning the hearts of listeners. It is especially Sanakā, the mother who, according to Āśutoṣ Bhaṭṭācārya, is the greatest character in Bijay Gupta's work: "The merchant Cānd(o) and Behulā often fly high above the dusty soil, but every step of Sanakā remains printed in the dust and soil of the earth. A long sigh of Sanakā's motherly heart overcasts the whole story of the *Manasāmaṅgal*. When reading Bijay Gupta's story, we may literally hear this sigh."⁷⁷ And the same author is undoubtedly right in concluding: "Bijay Gupta did not glorify a deity, he composed a song in praise of Man."⁷⁸

Whereas the differences in contents between the story outlined above and the version of Bijay Gupta are almost negligible,⁷⁹ the *Padmāpurāṇ* by another Eastern Bengali poet, Nārāyaṇdeb,⁸⁰ shows more independence. He resided in the village Borgrām in Mymensingh and his date is not known. His genealogical table brought up to the present century, however, indicates approximately the

⁷⁵ Quoted in ASITKUMĀR BANDYOPĀDHYĀY, BSI II, pp. 85-6.

⁷⁶ ĀŚUTOṢ BHAṬṬĀCĀRYA, BMI, p. 240.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 247.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 248.

⁷⁹ E.g., Cāndo is said to be of divine origin, perhaps to "explain" his extraordinary qualities.

⁸⁰ Edited by TAMONĀS DĀŚGUPTA, Calcutta 1942.

end of the 15th century as the most probable time of his life. He was very popular in Assam, under the name of Hukanānni, but Bengali manuscripts of his work are likewise numerous.

The main peculiarity of Nārāyaṇdeb's version is the rather exceptional stress laid on the first, "godly" part of Manasā's story. He was a learned man well-versed in Sanskrit literature which obviously attracted him more than the autochthonous "human" component. His Padmāpurāṇ is "a vast treasury of purāṇic stories in the Bengali language"⁸¹ which he drew especially from the Mahābhārata, Śivapurāṇa and Kālidāsa's Kumārasambhava. On the other hand, however, his Cāndo is an impressive and dignified personality, commanding authority and admiration; it was Nārāyaṇdeb who made Cāndo yield to Manasā's insistence with the utmost unwillingness and give her offerings "with his left hand only." Strong Sanskrit influence is indicated also by an episode introduced by Nārāyaṇdeb: Behulā, after returning home with her resurrected husband, had to pass a test of chastity, exactly as Sītā in the Rāmāyaṇa.

To complete the great trio, Bipradās Piplāi⁸² remains to be mentioned. Like Bijay Gupta, he also drew inspiration for the composition of his Manasāmaṅgal from a dream and wrote his work in 1495, "when Husen Śāh was the Sultan of Gaur." In his book, however, several localities are mentioned which did not exist at so early a time (among them Calcutta); the language contains a number of modern elements, in spite of the fact that the book has never gained much popularity. This makes some scholars believe that Bipradās was a poet of a much later period. On the other hand, his story is "told simply and effectively" and creates the impression of "an old, genuine and simple version of the Manasā saga," as claimed by Sukumar Sen.⁸³ We need not dwell more on it as it was the contents of this version which were given at the beginning of this chapter.

All the other extant versions of the Manasāmaṅgal—and there are dozens of them—were obviously written much later; the most important ones will be mentioned in the next chapters.

Before concluding this survey of the most ancient Bengali *maṅgalkāvyas*, a note must be added. Though the goddess Manasā had already appeared in the *purāṇas*, it was obviously not this deity which gave rise to the Bengali myths. "In the Purāṇas Manasā is depicted as a higher goddess having no connection with the stories of popular origin," states Pradyot Kumar Maity in his remarkable monograph on the cult of Manasā.⁸⁴ The exact localization of the origin of the snake goddess in this peculiar conception is not at all certain and there are many controversies on the point; but the majority of scholars dealing with the subject are inclined to believe in West Bengal as the original

⁸¹ ĀSUTOṢ BHATTĀCĀRYA, BMI, p. 232.

⁸² Translated into English by SUKUMĀR SEN, Calcutta 1953.

⁸³ In the Introduction to the edition quoted above, p. v.

⁸⁴ PRADYOT KUMAR MAITY, Historical Studies in the Cult of the Goddess Manasā. Calcutta 1966, p. 130. Cf. also T. W. CLARK, in Bull. School Or. and Afr. Stud. 17, p. 503.

home of the mythological cycle. In any case, however, it was East Bengal which proved to be the most fertile soil for the further spread of both the cult and its mythology.

It is certainly no mere coincidence that out of the three above-mentioned books, two claim to have been written "when Husen Śāh was the Sultan of Gaur." After long decades and even centuries of unrest, wars, anarchy and suffering, Bengal found a good ruler in Husen Śāh (1493-1519) who, though by birth a Pathan and a Muslim, was a tolerant man and a wise ruler. Almost the whole territory of Bengal, from Bihar and Hooghly to Chittagong and Sylhet, lived a happy, though short period of peace and prosperity under him. He was a supporter of arts and literature, not biased towards Hindu mythological poetry; and his son Nusarat Śāh followed his example.

Then, however, there followed another long period of fighting for supremacy in Bengal, resulting in a further deterioration of domestic economy and culture. It was only towards the end of the 16th century that the mighty Mughals intervened and Man Singh, sent by Akbar the Great, restored peace in the country. And it was at the end of the 16th century, too, that the oldest preserved versions of another *maṅgal*-poem appeared—the Caṇḍīmaṅgal.

Just as the Manasāmaṅgal, the story of the Caṇḍīmaṅgal must have undergone a very long period of development, before it acquired the form which is well known from numerous *maṅgalkāvyas*. The final story, as retold by its greatest poet Mukundarām Cakrabartī, runs as follows:

After the universe, gods etc. had been created by Dharma, Śiva married Dakṣa's daughter Satī who however committed suicide because her father and her husband started an irreconcilable quarrel. As Śiva's son is to defeat the demons, the god has to marry again and it is Gaurī (Caṇḍī), the daughter of Himālay, who, in spite of Śiva's unwillingness, succeeds in winning his hand. Śiva does not care much for his family and earns their living by begging. Caṇḍī decides to win the worship of human beings herself and chooses Nilāmbar, the son of the god Indra, to become the future propagator of her cult in the world. She makes him commit a mistake when he is bringing flowers for Śiva's worship and he is therefore cursed by Śiva to be born as a mortal. This is exactly what Caṇḍī wanted and by her cunning achieved, and she lets Nilāmbar be reborn as Kālketu, the son of the hunter Dharmaketu, and Chāyā, the wife of Nilāmbar, as Phullarā.

So much for the obligatory "divine" part of the Caṇḍīmaṅgal. The second part consists of two stories, one about the spread of Caṇḍī's cult among the lower strata of society and the other on its dissemination in the highest circles.

Kālketu grows into a handsome and skilful lad and is married to Phullarā. They are not rich, but they manage to make their living, Kālketu killing various animals and Phullarā selling the meat. The animals are worshippers of Caṇḍī and ask her for help. She makes them invisible and Kālketu is unable to kill a single prey. Instead he brings home a golden iguana found on the road—not knowing, of course, that it is the goddess Caṇḍī in disguise. Unseen by anybody Caṇḍī changes her appearance again, this time into a beautiful girl who pretends to the astonished Phullarā that she wants to stay with them. Phullarā tries to dissuade her by depicting (again in the form of a *bāromāsi*) various troubles and

sufferings of a poor hunter's family, and Kālketu does not want her to stay either. Finally she reveals her true identity, makes the hunter a rich man and orders him to establish a new city in Gujrāt and to introduce her cult. Kālketu obeys, with the help of Caṇḍī his new city is not only built, but also populated with various inhabitants, but Kālketu makes a certain Bāmṛu Datta furious by punishing him for oppressing the people. The rogue incites the king of the neighbouring country of Kalinga to declare war on Kālketu who is defeated and imprisoned. But the goddess helps him out again, his son is enthroned in Gujrāt and Kālketu and Phullarā may return back to heaven.

The hero of the third part is Dhanapati, a rich merchant in Ujāni and a man of two wives, Lahanā and Khullanā. Though the two love each other very much, Durbalā, the maid of Lahanā, incites hatred among them in order to profit from it. When Dhanapati is abroad, Khullanā must herd goats and she eventually becomes a worshipper of Caṇḍī; after the return of Dhanapati, she is helped by the goddess to pass a test of chastity. Dhanapati then leaves for Ceylon and Caṇḍī decides to punish him because he prevented Khullanā from worshipping her. On the high seas she appears as a girl sitting on a lotus and devouring elephants. Dhanapati tells of this unusual vision to the king of Ceylon, but unable to prove his story to be true, he is imprisoned. When his son Śrīmanṭa, born after his departure, has grown up, he is sent to look for his father, and meets exactly the same lot. He is to be executed for telling a lie, but Caṇḍī makes the king of Ceylon release both the son and the father and they return home as rich men to become Caṇḍī's ardent followers and to spread her cult.

Whereas the last story bears many signs of being an imitation of Cāndo's adventures and conversion, the legend of Kālketu the hunter is undoubtedly much older and more original. In spite of its repeated references to Kalinga and Gujrāt (both in Uṛissa), it is believed to be of Bengali folk-origin as neither this story nor Caṇḍī's cult have been found anywhere outside Bengal. In any case it reflects a rather ancient stage of social development and has many old features.

As was the case with the *Manasāmaṅgal*, no work that can be called the archetype of all later versions of the *Caṇḍīmaṅgal* has been preserved. Most probably it was only in the 16th century that the narratives of Caṇḍī reached the level of literary works. Though a certain Māṇik Datta was mentioned by Mukundarām Cakrabartī as the *ādīkavi* (the first poet) of the *Caṇḍīmaṅgal*, nobody believes that the book preserved under his name in two manuscript copies is identical with the work mentioned and highly appreciated by Mukundarām. It is obviously a much later book by an unknown poet of the same name undistinguished in any respect. Thus the oldest extant version of the *Caṇḍīmaṅgal*—under the title of *Sāradāmaṅgal* or *Sāradācarita*—is believed to be a book written by Dvija Mādhav;⁸⁵ it has the date 1579 in its colophon.

There is much confusion about the author as there are many other works going under this name; but scholars mostly believe that the author of the *Śrīkṛṣṇamaṅgal*, mentioned in the previous chapter, had nothing to do with the poet of the *Sāradāmaṅgal*. The latter's book has been very popular in the

⁸⁵ Edited, under the title *Maṅgalcaṇḍī gīt*, by SUDHĪBHŪṢAṆ BHATṬĀCĀRYA, Calcutta 1952.

Chittagong area and though it is rather concise and simple in style, it offers a vivid picture of Bengali life and a number of living characters.

Dviḷa Māḍhab's Sārādāmaṅgal would have gained more popularity among the masses and more esteem among critics, were it not for the fact that it was completely overshadowed by the Caṇḍīmaṅgal of one of his contemporaries, Mukundarām Cakrabartī alias Kabikaṅkan. There are many points, in the history of Bengali literature, on which Bengali scholars disagree one with another; in one respect, however, they are unanimous—that Mukundarām was not only the greatest representative of the whole large field of *maṅgalkābyas* but also one of the greatest writers of mediaeval Bengali poetry.

Mukundarām Cakrabartī was an exceptional personality in many respects. Unlike many other mediaeval Bengali poets, he did not confine himself to leaving behind a mere cryptic date liable to be confused by scribes and juggled with by singers, but included in his work a real *ātmaḷibaraṇī* (self-description, autobiography) which is short but unusually vivid and realistic. We learn from it that for several generations, the poet's family lived in Dāminyā (or Dāmuniyā), Burdwan, but at the time when Man Singh, Akbar's governor of Bengal, started his march to Orissa, the conditions were made unbearable by wicked officers who oppressed the people and robbed them of all property. Mukundarām with his family left home and after a troublesome journey reached Āraṛā in Midnapore where he made his living as the tutor of Raghunāth, the son of Bāmkuṛā Rāy. In 1573 Raghunāth succeeded his father and Mukundarām fulfilled his promise given to the goddess Caṇḍī during his sorrowful journey, to compose a *maṅgalkābya* in her honour. It was an immediate success and has remained one of the peaks of Bengali poetry ever afterwards.

Thus it may be safely concluded that Mukundarām left his home village in Burdwan in 1544 and finished his book around 1590.

It excels in all respects. Mukundarām obviously did not waste his time when he was in the service of Bāmkuṛā Rāy and Raghunāth. His Caṇḍīmaṅgal (or Abhayāmaṅgal, or Kabikaṅkaṇcaṇḍī)⁸⁶ is a work of a mature poet, master of poetic technique, not incidentally honoured by the ruler with a bracelet (*kaṅkaṇ*; hence his honorific title Kabikaṅkaṇ). His verse is fluent and melodious, every change in rhythm seems to result from a well-calculated intention for the maximum effect. All metaphors and similes purposefully serve their end as if adding the final touch to the respective portion narrated or described. In poetic technique, it was only Bhāratcandra Rāy, almost two centuries later, who was able to compete with Mukundarām.

Mukundarām was an excellent stylist and narrator. The individual songs of his book as well as its single sections are skilfully connected. Though consisting of three parts, the book forms a homogeneous whole. The action develops without monotony, never slipping into sentimentality, as was so often the case

⁸⁶ Edited, e.g., by DĪNEŚCANDRA SEN, CĀRUCANDRA BANDYOPĀDHYĀY and HṚṢĪKEŚ BASU, Calcutta 1924.

with many mediaeval Bengali poets. Add to this the importance of the *rasa*, the emotional effect, which was dominating Indian poetry for many centuries. Mukundarām is one of those great poets who are aware of the fact that it is not by consistent pushing in one emotional direction that the highest possible emotional effect is achieved, but by a skilful introduction of different emotional tints, by clever insertions of, e.g., humorous or pathetic intermezzos, to balance the whole and make the basic *rasa* shine in a brighter colour—as the white shines more against a black background.

What the reader—even a modern one—has to admire most in Mukundarām's Caṇḍimaṅgal is the characters created by the poet to carry the burden of the story. They are many, but even the most episodical ones reveal the poet's admirable skill in characterization and his psychological insight.

The characters of gods, in the first part of the story, are rather different from those depicted, for instance, by Bijay Gupta or Bipradās. In accordance with the general tendency and the unwritten law of *maṅgalkāvyas*, Mukundarām also humanized them, but in another way than his predecessors. He lets Śiva and Gauri play dice and quarrel, he lets Caṇḍī plot against Nīlāmbar in order to bring Śiva's curse on him and thus achieve her aim—but he never lets them lose their dignity and betray moral standards. Even poisonous snakes felt pity for Cāndo's sons whom Manasā decided to kill ruthlessly in spite of the fact that their mother Sanakā was her ardent worshipper. Mukundarām's Caṇḍī would never do anything of the kind. She lets Dhanapati and his son be imprisoned, in order to reach the goal she is following, but she never betrays her worshippers. The humanization of gods in Mukundarām appears to be rather a device for making them more sympathetic and nearer to human perception. His Śiva is undoubtedly a sympathetic figure, extremely human when expressing, for instance, his wish with regard to what Caṇḍī should prepare him for a meal,⁸⁷ or when trying to dissuade her from her intention to marry him:

Vain was the birth of her who marries a poor man,
poverty kills every virtue.
You will be a beggar's housewife who passes her life in sorrow,
nobody praises a poor man.⁸⁸

But it is especially the second part of the book, the story of Kālketu and Phullarā, which gave the poet most opportunity to exploit his talents for characteristic portrayal. Kālketu is a hero, no doubt of it, but he is a man nonetheless, a living being with virtues as well as weak sides. He has his good and bad moods, his tempers and persistence, he likes his hunter's job and loves his wife. Poverty, incessant toil and low social status have taught him lessons which are hard to forget. A single example may suffice to show Mukundarām's

⁸⁷ Kabikaṅkaṇ-Caṇḍī, ed. by DINESCANDRA SEN, Cārucandra Bandyopādhyāy and Hṛṣīkeś BASU. Part I, Calcutta 1924, p. 86.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 68.

masterful way of letting the listener peep into the soul of his hero: Caṇḍī gave him immense riches, seven pitchers full of treasures. Twice he went home, with two pitchers each time, and three pitchers remained to be carried home.

The hero wants to go again and carry the three pitchers,
 Yet he is unable to carry one burden and a half (at once) and gets restless.
 Seeing him restless, Abhayā (i.e. Caṇḍī) tells the hero:
 I shall show mercy on you and carry a pitcher on my (own) shoulder.
 Caṇḍī goes behind, Kālketu goes in front,
 Again and again he turns to look behind.
 In his soul, Kālketu was afraid
 That Pārbatī might run away with the pitcher full of treasures.⁸⁹

It is scenes like this which, in Mukundarām's version, turn myths into vivid narratives and their heroes and heroines into men and women of this world.

Another episodic character may be quoted to show Mukundarām's mastery in full light, that of Murārī Śīl the merchant. When Kālketu comes to him to sell him a precious ring given by Caṇḍī, Murārī Śīl hides in his house, afraid that the hunter has come to ask for money he owes him for meat. But as soon as his wife is told that Kālketu has a ring to sell, Murārī Śīl appears and even reproaches the hunter for coming so seldom to see him. He quickly appraises the ring, the value of which is "seventy million rupees," and offers his "beloved brother's son"—a few annas. It is only by the threat of going to another merchant that Murārī is forced to pay the full price.

And yet another instance: As an immortal figure of Bengali literature, "the delightful rogue Bhāmṛu Datta"⁹⁰ has been appreciated by many, and rightly so. It is his cunning, his boastful talk and his ruthless oppression of the people which are emphasized to characterize him. He wants to take his revenge on Kālketu who has punished him for his behaviour. "Again Phullarā will sell meat in the market," he swears in secret and goes to Kalinga to incite the king against Kālketu. He is a bad character, a negative type, no doubt, but as lively and likely a man as the other figures in Mukundarām's poem.

It is not difficult to guess why Mukundarām was so successful in portraying all his heroes and episodic characters. He must have been a shrewd observer, able to turn much of what he saw, heard and experienced during his turbulent life into literary materials, vivid and convincing as life itself. Even though his Caṇḍimaṅgal is not altogether free from weaker parts and components—as rightly observed by Asit Bandyopādhyāy, its third part is considerably worse than the first and the second ones, being too long and dreary at some places—his talent was unrivalled in his time and his poem raised the standard of mediaeval Bengali literature considerably.

We may now come back to the question as to where to look for the origin of all these *maṅgalkāvyas* and their stories and cults. The reader might have observed how often it is stated in these poems that it was a woman who first

⁸⁹ Ibid., pp. 214–5.

⁹⁰ SUKUMAR SEN, HBL, p. 129.

accepted and practised the cult of Manasā or Caṇḍī; Sanakā as well as Behulā had worshipped the goddess of snakes long before Cāndo and Lakhindar recognized her, and Khullanā preceded her husband Dhanapati in worshipping Caṇḍī, too. This is certainly not a matter of chance but a pattern—not incidentally until today, the worship of goddesses, especially Manasā is predominantly an affair of women in the Bengali countryside.

Its most typical manifestation is the so-called *brata* (Sanskrit *vrata*), which is “a vowed observance, a religious act of devotion and austerity” as well as “any rite practised or observed.”⁹¹ The rites of Manasā are to be met till today, both in West Bengal and in Bangladesh. “When a Vrata rite is observed, a story which glorifies the goddess for whom it is observed is narrated in simple prose, usually by an elderly woman of the family but sometimes by a woman story teller,” states Maity.⁹² This story or *bratakathā*, in Burdwan and Malda up to the present day identical with the Behulā-Lakhindar story of the Manasā-maṅgal, may be believed to have given rise to the narratives of the Manasā-maṅgal, and the same holds good with regard to the Caṇḍīmaṅgal.⁹³ In their present form⁹⁴ *bratakathās* are very simple narratives, reminding of fairy-tales; but it is not difficult to trace much of the imagination of these stories even in the most elaborate versions of the *maṅgalkābyas* they have given rise to.

⁹¹ S. R. DAS in *Man in India*, 32, No. 4, p. 212.

⁹² MAITY, op. cit., p. 300.

⁹³ ĀSUTOṢ BHATṬĀCĀRYA, BMI, p. 25; SUKUMAR SEN, HBL, p. 61.

⁹⁴ Cf. ĀSUTOṢ BHATṬĀCĀRYA, *Meyeder bratakathā*, Calcutta 1947.

CAITANYA AND HIS BIOGRAPHIES

At the beginning of his biography of Caitanya, Bṛndāban Dās, a younger contemporary of the great Saint, described the spiritual decline in Bengal at the end of the 15th century:

“The whole world is void of devotion to Kṛṣṇarām . . . The only pious act which people know is the whole-night’s singing of the songs on Maṅgalcaṇḍī. Some people bring offerings to Bīṣahari (i.e. Manasā), boasting of their piousness, others spend much money on letting puppets dance. They waste much wealth on marrying their sons and daughters and their time passes in vain. Even all these Bhaṭṭācāryas, Cakrabartīs and Mīśras do not know the inner contents of the Books. By teaching sacred texts they achieve but one thing—along with their listeners they are drowned in the ties of the God of Death . . . There is no praise of Hari (i.e. Viṣṇu) in anyone’s mouth . . . Even when asked, nobody utters the name of Krishna, (everybody) is maddened by business only, nobody is devoted to the Kṛṣṇapūjā and Viṣṇu. Some people offer in various ways to Bāśuli, some bring offerings of wine and meat. All the time, there resound songs, music and dances . . .”⁹⁵

This, of course, is a criticism coming from the pen of a devout Krishnaita. But it cannot be denied that the spiritual life of the Hindus in Bengal—and not only in Bengal—became stagnant in the blind alley of empty and formal ritualism, on the one hand, and superstitions and darkness of primitive cults, on the other. Those who should have raised the religious morals of the broad masses, the Brahmins, preferred the study of and minute research in Nyāya philosophy and stood aloof from the simple village people and their religious life.

It was, however, the period of the greatest endangerment of Hinduism by Islam. Bengal was, for the most part, not only under the ruthless rule of Muslim Sultans and their Nawabs, but also under the pressure of Islamization propagated by Sufi “missionaries” and promoted, in various ways, by the rulers. It was at this time that larger numbers of Bengalis, especially in the eastern part of the country, came to be converted to Islam—a fact the consequences of which did not become apparent till recent times. Something had to be done in order to divert the imminent threat to the thousand-years’ creed and way of life.

This historical task was accomplished by Caitanya,⁹⁶ a Bengali Brahmin

⁹⁵ Bṛndāban Dās, Śrīcaitanyaḥgabat, ed. by MEITYUNJAY DE, Calcutta 1951, pp. 15–16.

⁹⁶ On Caitanya, see SUSHIL KUMAR DE, *Early History of the Vaiṣṇava Faith and Movement in Bengal*, Calcutta 1942; DINESH CHANDRA SEN, *Chaitanya and His Companions*, Calcutta 1917; DINESH CHANDRA SEN, *Chaitanya and His Age*, Calcutta 1924; SHISHIR KUMAR GHOSE, *Lord Gauranga*, 2 vols., 3rd ed., Calcutta 1923; MELVILLE KENNEDY, *The Chaitanya Movement: A Study of the Vaiṣṇavism of Bengal*, Calcutta 1925; S. CHAKRAVARTI, *Chaitanya et sa théorie de l’amour divin*, Paris 1933 (with a bibliography); BIMĀNBHĀRĪ MAJUMDĀR, *Śrīcaitya-carita upādān*, Calcutta 1939; BĀSANTĪ CAUDHURĪ, *Bāmlār baiṣṇab samāj, saṅgīt o sāhitya*, Calcutta 1968; W. EIDLITZ, *Kṛṣṇa-Caitanya, Sein Leben und Seine Lehre*, Stockholm 1968 (with a bibliography, p. 548f.).

from Nabadvīp, then the most important centre of Hindu learning in Bengal. He must have been an exceptional personality, capable of influencing both the learned and simple people. Though he himself did not write anything, apart from eight devotional stanzas in Sanskrit, he occupies an important place in the history of Bengali literature.

His proper name was Bīśvambhar, but in the earlier part of his life he was affectionately called Nīmāi Paṇḍit; later he became famous under the name of Śrīcaitanya, given to him by his *guru* Keśab Bhāratī. He was born on the 27th of February, 1486, in Nabadvīp, and soon gained the reputation of a very good student and an intelligent scholar. He started teaching at a traditional school (*tol*), married twice (his first wife died of snakebite), but in 1508, when visiting Gayā to perform funeral rites for his father, he met Mādhavendra Purī, one of the greatest propagators of the devotional cult of Krishna in Eastern India, and obviously under his influence changed his spiritual outlook and later even the whole way of his life. Dissatisfied with mere learning and dry wisdom, he decided to devote his life to the propagation of the cult of *bhakti*, utmost devotion, towards Krishna, and in order to be completely free for this new task, he left home and became a *sannyāsin*, i.e. a homeless "holy man" wandering from place to place. It was necessary also from the point of view of his mission. "This was always the ideal of Indian religious gurus," says Asit Bandyopādhyāy. "Nobody would accept spiritual instruction from a householder."⁹⁷ Since 1510 Caitanya spent the rest of his life visiting different and sometimes rather distant places in India, but mostly staying in Puri where he also died on the 29th of June, 1530.

From the very beginning of his religious career, he was surrounded not only by large numbers of devoted disciples and followers, but also by masses of people whom he deeply influenced by his extatic way of worshipping Lord Krishna. We can hardly speak of any specific doctrine underlying his religious practice and experience. It was only *bhakti*, an unrestrained devotion expressed by singing devotional songs and by *nāmkaraṇ*, i.e. repeating various names of Viṣṇu. In this respect, Caitanya perfectly exploited the emotionality of his countrymen, always tending more readily towards emotional extasy than towards calm rationality. And it was also in this direction that he made his chief contribution to a new upsurge of Bengali poetry—of devotional verses inspired by the same extatic attitude towards Krishna and unlimited admiration for his Divine Play.

Shortly after his death, Caitanya was deified and proclaimed another incarnation (*avatāra*) of Viṣṇu. No wonder that those who had witnessed and co-experienced his almost miraculous influence, refused to consider him an ordinary man. His achievements in the sphere of religious life were unprecedented. Even during his lifetime, his deification had started already, but was held

⁹⁷ ASITKUMĀR BANDYOPĀDHYĀY, BSI II, p. 199.

in check by the Saint himself. After his death, the act was accomplished and Caitanya joined the large host of superhuman beings worshipped by the Hindus.

We shall refrain from speaking at large of his numerous followers and successors among whom many famous personalities of mediaeval Bengal might be mentioned, such as the brothers Rūpa and Sanātana Gosvāmī, Advaita, Nityānanda and others. Their importance for the development of Bengali literature is much less than that of their great teacher, though some of them did contribute much to Sanskrit literature (e. g. Rūpa Gosvāmī) or to the elaboration of the Vaishnava religious ideology. An explanation of Caitanya's significance for Bengali literature must be followed along two lines: as the subject of many biographies, and as the initiator of a great upsurge of Bengali Krishnaite lyrics.

The earliest of these biographies may be left aside. They were composed in Sanskrit and their main importance lies in the fact that they promoted the spread of Caitanya's cult all over India. Let us therefore just mention in passing that the oldest of these biographies was composed during Caitanya's life, by Murāri Gupta, and is known under the title *Kaṛacā* or *Śrīśrīkṛṣṇacaitanyacaritāmṛta* (The Nectar of Life of Holy Śrīkṛṣṇacaitanya), and the second was the *Caitanyacaritāmṛta* by Paramānanda Sen (Dās) known as *Kavikarṇāpūra* (composed in 1542). Soon, however, biographies in Bengali appeared, too, all composed in verse and not infrequently rather bulky, trying to form a kind of counterpart to the famous *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*.

This intention is especially obvious in the first of these biographies, *Śrīcaitanyabhāgabat* (originally entitled *Śrīcaitanyamaṅgal*) by Bṛndāban Dās, a younger contemporary of the Great Saint. The date of the composition of this work is unknown and so is also the year of Bṛndāban's birth; most probably he was born sometime between 1510–20 (Dineśchandra Sen's date of 1535⁹⁸ seems improbable). He did not, however, know Caitanya personally and in his account he had to rely on what he was told by other people, especially his Guru Nityānanda.

Bṛndāban's book—rather bulky, comprising about 25,000 lines in the traditional *payār*-metre—is divided into three parts, depicting Caitanya's birth and childhood, his career since the sojourn in Gayā till the day when he became a *sannyāsin*, and the rest of his life. The book is reputed to have always been a favourite with the Bengali Vaishnava community, especially the broader uneducated masses—and this is not surprising. Bṛndāban succeeded in composing a narrative which may sound naive and emotionally overburdened to an outsider, but its *bhakti*-tone is in perfect accord with Caitanya's mission and the belief of his devotees. He is not a philosopher or historian like, for instance, Kṛṣṇadās Kabirāj whose version of Caitanya's life we shall mention later on, but a born poet and lyricist, able to re-create and enliven the milieu in which Caitanya grew up and lived. In this respect, Bṛndāban's book ranks among the best in contemporary Bengali literature.

⁹⁸ DINESH CHANDRA SEN, HBL, p. 464.

It is especially the account of Caitanya's childhood (in the 4th and 5th subsections of the first part) which excels in presenting a vivid picture of Nimāi, as the Saint used to be called then, that is "entirely human"⁹⁹ in spite of the fact that it relates episodes that are not always probable and clearly imitate the corresponding incidents of Krishna's childhood in the Bhāgavatapurāṇa. At the age of four months, Nimāi scatters various things around the room, when left alone; he stops crying as soon as he hears Viṣṇu's name uttered or a devotional song sung; he catches a cobra which has crept into the house and peacefully sleeps on it; later on, he steals milk and curd, but is always excused; he eats up all meals prepared for a Vaishnava Brahmin because the latter has "invited" Viṣṇu before taking his meal; he plays and frolics when bathing in the river Gaṅgā, disturbing the meditations of religious mendicants, carrying away girls' clothes, etc. Throughout all these incidents he remains a sweet child loved and adored by all and able to enchant everybody.

In its appeal to the broadest masses of Vaishnavas, Bṛndāban's work had a single rival in the Śrīcaitanya-maṅgal¹⁰⁰ composed by Locandās, well-known for his lyrical stanzas too. The poet was born in Kogram and his religious teacher was Narahari Sarkār. Locan's name is connected with numerous legends, but nothing positive is known about his dates and the time when he wrote his book, which with full justification was entitled a "*maṅgal*." It is much smaller than Bṛndāban's book, comprising around 10,000 lines, and is based on Murāri Gupta's Sanskrit Śrīkṛṣṇacaitanyacaritāmṛta, but in its conception it does not conceal the mighty influence of non-Vaishnava *maṅgal*-poetry. Whereas Bṛndāban Dās conceived Caitanya as an incarnation of Viṣṇu-Krishna, Locandās believed that he was an *avatāra* of both Krishna and Rādhā in one person—the conception which won much popularity shortly after the death of Caitanya and was propounded by Murāri Gupta, Narahari Sarkār and other eminent religious personalities of the 16th century.

Another biography of a very similar *maṅgal*-conception, the Śrīcaitya-maṅgal by Jayānanda¹⁰¹ from Burdwān, did not enjoy much popularity and had to be re-discovered in our age, but yet another book on the Great Saint was written about the end of the 16th century, which was highly appreciated not only by the Vaishnava intellectual élite, but also by many historians of Bengali literature and considered to be one of the peaks of and "a landmark in New Indian literature";¹⁰² it was the Śrīcaityacaritāmṛta (The Nectar of the Life of Caitanya) by Kṛṣṇadās Kabirāj.¹⁰³

The story of his life, as told by himself in his book, is rather simple. He lived in a Burdwan village as an obviously affluent householder, but was ordered, in a dream, to leave his home and go to the holiest place of the Vaishnavas,

⁹⁹ SUKUMAR SEN, HBL, p. 96.

¹⁰⁰ Edited by MRNĀLKĀNTI GHOṢ, Calcutta 1948.

¹⁰¹ Edited by NAGENDRANĀTH BASU and KĀLIDĀS NĀTH, Calcutta 1906.

¹⁰² SUKUMAR SEN, HBL, p. 98.

¹⁰³ Edited by RĀDHĀGOBINDA NĀTH, 6 vols., Calcutta 1948.

Brindaban (near Mathurā). Here he spent the rest of his very long life, studying Vaishnava theology and philosophy under such famous followers of Caitanya as Sanātan and Rūp Gosvāmī, Raghunāth Bhaṭṭācārya and others. Apart from a number of Sanskrit books, among which the Govindalīlāmṛta (The Nectar of the Divine Play of Krishna) is worthy of special mention, he must have been gathering, for long years, materials for a biography which he finally wrote, according to his own words, at a very high age. The individual historians of Bengali literature differ considerably in their opinion on the year when this large book was finished; Asit Bandyopādhyāy, on the ground of very plausible arguments, places this date after 1592.¹⁰⁴

As his honorific title Kabirāj (King among Poets) indicates, Kṛṣṇadās has always been held in high esteem. His Śrīcāitanyacaritāmṛta is a unique work in its field. It is obviously a fruit of long considerations and careful preparations. The author mentions various circumstances which made him write the book in its actual form and conception, especially the existence of Bṛndāban Dās' Śrīcāitanyabhāgabat which he spoke of with reverence and did not want to duplicate in any way. Besides, the intellectual and philosophically minded milieu of the Vaishnava centre in Brindaban where he wrote his book undoubtedly favoured a more ambitious creation than a mere popular account of Caitanya's life; and the fact that Kṛṣṇadās had the greatest authorities of contemporary Bengali Vishnuism among his teachers also contributed to the composition of a book which, as rightly stated by Sukumar Sen, is "not merely a biography," but "a compendium of the Vaishnava faith in both its mystic and its philosophical aspects."¹⁰⁵

Kṛṣṇadās treated childhood and youth of Caitanya succinctly, in order to differentiate his work from that of Bṛndāban Dās. He divided his bulky book into three parts and his main concern was the final period of Caitanya's life, depicted obviously on the ground of recollections of eye-witnesses and persons who were close to the Great Saint; it is a very vivid picture, revealing the author's command of the poetic art. Even more interesting, however, are those parts of his biography which are devoted to long discussions on the Vaishnava religion, often given the form of dialogues and disputes, e.g. between Caitanya and the famous Vedāntist Vāsudeva Sārvabhauma or Rāmānanda. Kṛṣṇadās never poses as an authority on religious and philosophical problems and his book is no *śāstra* written to be quoted in learned disputes. He maintains, throughout his work, the position of an utterly humble and devoted "servant" (the usual Vaishnava "adopted name" Dās of this meaning comports perfectly with this attitude), eager only to convey his unbounded devotion to Caitanya, the ultimate incarnation of Krishna-Rādhā, and to inspire his co-believers with the same emotion. Kṛṣṇadās' intellectual level was very high and his mastery of the most subtle details of the Vaishnava doctrine is beyond dispute; moreover

¹⁰⁴ ASITKUMĀR BANDYOPĀDHYĀY, BSI II, pp. 414-20.

¹⁰⁵ SUKUMAR SEN, HBL, p. 97.

he succeeded in turning it into a well-integrated component of his book, subordinated to its main aim which was to sing the glory of Caitanya.

Kṛṣṇadās Kabirāj lived for a long time in Bihar, in non-Bengali surroundings, which accounts for the use of certain Braj expressions in his book. His language, however, is certainly no "mixture of Bengali and Hindi," as maintained by some authors.¹⁰⁶ Asit Bandyopādhyāy and Sukumar Sen appreciate his language highly, the latter even stating that it was "much in advance of his time."¹⁰⁷ In this respect, too, Kṛṣṇadās was a great poet and his place in Bengali literature is incontestable.

We shall refrain from speaking about the so-called Kaṛcā¹⁰⁸ by Gobindadās Karmakār, describing the journey of Caitanya to Southern and Western India, as it is generally considered to be either a complete forgery or a clumsy re-writing of a fragment,¹⁰⁹ and shall just mention the last extant biography of Caitanya written in the 16th century. It is the Gaurāṅgabijay¹¹⁰ (The Victory of Caitanya) by Cūrāmaṇi Dās, composed probably about the middle of the century. The work has, however, been preserved in a fragmentary way which does not allow of a more detailed analysis and appreciation.

Another branch of Vaishnava literature, in which the influence of Caitanya was to be felt, immediately after his death, were further Bengali adaptations of the Bhāgavatapurāṇa. At least three works of this kind belong to the 16th century; of these the Śrīkṛṣṇapremtaraṅgiṇī¹¹¹ (The River of Krishna's Love) by Raghunāth Paṇḍit or Bhāgabādācārya Raghunāth is the oldest, having been finished in the first half of the century. It is a very large book and covers the whole of the Bhāgavatapurāṇa.

Much popularity was enjoyed by the Śrīkṛṣṇamaṅgal of Mādhav Ācārya, composed probably in the middle of the 16th century. It is based on the 10th book of the Sanskrit *purāṇa* and may be called a re-telling rather than an adaptation or even translation. On the same basis the Gobindamaṅgal¹¹² was written by Duḥkhī ('Sorrowful') Śyāmadās in the second half of the century, a work containing many folk elements and more independent, in contents and spirit, of the Sanskrit model than the other works preceding it.

After the 16th century, only a few books of this kind and minor works of biographical character about Caitanya and his main disciples were composed; they need not be dealt with here. Anyway, all these books fall into insignificance when compared to the most developed branch of Bengali Vaishnava literature—its lyrical songs.

¹⁰⁶ DINESH CHANDRA SEN, HBL, pp. 481–2; J. C. GHOSH, BL, p. 51.

¹⁰⁷ SUKUMAR SEN, HBL, p. 98.

¹⁰⁸ Edited by DINESHCANDRA SEN and BANOYĀRILĀL GOSVĀMĪ, Calcutta 1926.

¹⁰⁹ ASITKUMĀR BANDYOPĀDHYĀY, BSI II, pp. 440–76, has summed up the discussions concerning the authenticity of this book in a very comprehensive way.

¹¹⁰ Edited by SUKUMĀR SEN, Calcutta 1957.

¹¹¹ Edited by NAGENDRANĀTH BASU, Calcutta 1905, and again by BASANTARĀÑ-JAN RAY, Calcutta 1910.

¹¹² Edited by ĪŚĀNCANDRA BASU, Calcutta 1886.

THE VAISHNAVA PADAS

Various native historians of classical Bengali literature have many times stated that it is the lyrical Vaishnava songs called *pada* which represent the highest peak of perfection ever reached by pre-modern Bengali poets. It cannot be denied that in this particular literary form, the Bengali poetic genius and emotionality found their most suitable outlet.

The *pada*¹¹³ is a one-strophed lyrical song of no fixed length, but tending towards relative shortness. In about 10–20 lines it offers an accomplished poetic miniature, inspired by the Krishna-Rādhā legend or, in a far smaller number of cases, the deified personality of Caitanya. It is usually conceived in couplets, most frequently in the *payār*- or *tripadī*-metre and always rhymed, with frequent use of the refrain technique; the last couplet mostly contains the so-called *bhaṇitā* or colophon with the name of the author and his personal “comment.”

Being a song and always meant to be sung, the *pada* aims at melodiousness, exploiting the vast possibilities offered by the Bengali language in this respect. Besides these euphonic qualities, metaphors, similes and other poetic devices are used to enhance the beauty of the verse. Directions concerning the tunes and rhythm to be used are often indicated.

All these formal means are, however, subordinated to the main goal of the *pada* which is the expression of the attitude of the poet (*padakartā*) towards Krishna, ever since Caitanya almost exclusively the feeling of devotion (*bhakti*). The outer frame is rather simple: the poet selects a certain “situation” from the vast repertory of the Krishna-Rādhā legend and elaborates it into an independent song. As an illustration, I quote, in a translation as literal as possible and with the typical division of *tripadī*-lines maintained, a *pada* by the poet Locandās:

Listen to what he did, I am ashamed to say it,
we saw each other under a kadamba tree.
The Black one wound with care a garland of various flowers
and wanted to put it round my neck.
I was dying of sorrow, there was no fear in his heart,
a few friends were with us.
Using all my cleaverness, I pulled my robe athwart,
I was afraid lest somebody should see us.
He does not know what is his and what not, he thinks every house to be his own,
he does not look back at anybody.
He smiles when he sees me, he comes with outstretched arms,
puts his cheek to the mine and kisses me.

¹¹³ Several selections have been edited, e.g. by KHAGENDRANĀTH MITRA, SUKUMĀR SEN, BĪŚYAPATI CAUDEHURĪ and ŚYĀMPRASĀD CAKRABARTĪ, Calcutta 1952; by SUKUMĀR SEN, New Delhi 1957; by HAREKṚṢṢṆA MUKHOPĀDHYĀY, Calcutta 1961, etc. In English, see In Praise of Krishna, Songs from the Bengali, translated by Edward C. DIMOCK, JR., and DENISE LEVERTOV, London 1968.

He caught my robe at the neck and entreated me very much
 I did not give him any answer.
 Locan says: Lost is your honour, all Gokul is upset,
 will cleverness help you now ?¹¹⁴

Everyone acquainted with the Krishna-Rādhā story knows immediately where to place this song, and knows as well that these words are spoken by Rādhā when she is still unwilling to yield to the amorous advances of the Black God. And a person more intimately acquainted with Rūpa Gosvāmī's poetics Ujjvalanīlamanī can with ease name the respective *rasa* and the phase of the psychological development of Rādhā in her relation to the Lord.

Thousands of *padas* of this sort were composed between the 15th and the 19th centuries in Bengal, connected with Krishna's birth (*janmālīlā*, i.e. the divine play of birth), his childhood and especially his love affair with Rādhā, from their first meeting until the time when Rādhā laments her separation (*biraha*) from Krishna, the latter being the most frequent and favourite motif. Each of these songs, with very few exceptions of those incorporated into larger epics such as the Śrīkṛṣṇakīrtan by Baṛu Caṇḍīdās, was quite separate and independent and their preservation would have posed a serious problem. Fortunately enough, two ways of preserving these *padas* were invented and used—the so-called *kīrtan*-singing and the compilation of anthologies.

Kīrtan may be characterized as a gathering of Vaishnavas in order to sing songs of devotion to Krishna and thus to express their religious attitude. There are various kinds of *kīrtan*, such as *nāmkīrtan* or *saṅkīrtan* during which the names of Vishnu are sung, or *sūcak kīrtan*, organized at the anniversaries of great Vaishnava saints, but the most typical is the *līlākīrtan* or *pālākīrtan*, consisting of singing *padas* made by various Vaishnava poets. It is sometimes believed that it was Caitanya himself who "invented" this particular kind of worship, but it was undoubtedly his follower Narottam Dās who made an institution of it. The year 1582 is usually given as the beginning of regular *kīrtan*-singing. In a way, each *kīrtan* "session" is a repetition of the whole Krishna-Rādhā legend, each phase being represented by one or more *padas*. There is, however, a sort of introduction consisting of some *padas* on Caitanya (called Gauracandrikā) who, as we must not forget, was believed to be Krishna himself or even Krishna and Rādhā in one.

This *kīrtan*-singing gave an impetus to preserve, by oral tradition, the best *padas* composed by various *padakartās* and to give them a very wide publicity. It was especially during the 17th century that the number of Vaishnava *padas* grew considerably and at the beginning of the 18th century the idea was born to collect them into anthologies which came to form a written counterpart of a *kīrtan*-session. There were many of them, the earliest being probably the Kṣaṇa-dāgītacintāmaṇi¹¹⁵ compiled by Biśvanāth Cakrabartī Hariballabh, and the

¹¹⁴ Baiṣṇab-padābali, ed. by SUKUMĀR SEN. New Delhi 1957, pp. 22-3.

¹¹⁵ Edited by RĀDHĀNĀTH KĀBĀSĪ, Calcutta 1925.

largest the *Padakalpataru*¹¹⁶ by Gokulānanda Sen Baṁśīdās, comprising more than 3,100 songs. Exactly as a *kīrtan*-session, the anthologies followed the Krishna-Rādhā legend from its beginning (or better to say prehistory, i.e. the birth of Lord Krishna and that of Rādhā), and dividing it into the individual phases, they collected various *padas* into groups describing the same "situation" and marked by the same emotional tonality. Though they were collections of songs composed by the Vaishnavas, compiled by the Vaishnavas and meant for the Vaishnavas and although the religious aspect was the decisive factor, one cannot miss also the obvious effort to include the aesthetically and poetically best pieces.

The development of the Vaishnava *padas* covers a large stretch of time and its beginning dates from long before Caitanya.

It is Jayadeva's *Gitagovinda* and songs composed by Vidyāpati which are invariably mentioned as the main source of inspiration of these *padakartās*, the former being in Sanskrit and the latter in Maithili. In the period preceding the time of Caitanya, Mithilā was the main centre of Hindu culture and education in Eastern India and the greatest Maithili poet Vidyāpati (probably of the 15th century) exercised a strong influence on all subsequent Bengali Vaishnava lyrics. All these non-Bengali models, combined with the belief that it was the language of the Braj region around Brindaban which was spoken by Krishna, led to the very frequent use of the so-called Brajabuli in Vaishnava poetry, a language which "with its variable vowel length and moraic metre and with its archaic vocabulary and minimum of grammar, offered to the better equipped writers a sonorous instrument that was almost ready-made."¹¹⁷ In fact, a large part of the poetry of Bengali *padakartās* was composed in this language.

In the songs of both Vidyāpati and Caṇḍīdās, who is the only representative of the pre-Caitanya *pada*-literature in Bengali preserved, the conception of Krishnaite subjects differs in some degree from that to be found in the *padas* influenced by Caitanya. Though the element of *bhakti* cannot be denied to both these streams, it clearly predominates in the latter, whereas the former appears to be mainly influenced by a more "secular" conception. As shown by Śaśībhūṣaṇ Dāśgupta,¹¹⁸ there is much affinity between this early Krishnaite literature and the love poetry of Ancient India of the Amaru- and Bhartṛhari-type. Nothing would be more natural. Early Vaishnava poets obviously put much of their personal experience and their own emotional life into these verses, invariably using the Krishna-Rādhā subject.

A very large number of Bengali *padas* (more than one thousand) bear the name of Caṇḍīdās¹¹⁹ in their colophons, and a few of them rank among the best

¹¹⁶ Edited by SATIŚCANDRA RĀY, 5 vols., Calcutta 1915-31.

¹¹⁷ SUKUMAR SEN, HBL, p. 103.

¹¹⁸ Śrīrādhār kramabikāś darśane o sāhitye. Calcutta 1953.

¹¹⁹ The editions are many, e.g., Caṇḍīdās-padāvalī, edited and introduced by DĪNENDRAKUMĀR RĀY, Calcutta s.d. (1933). In English, see Love Songs of Chandi-

samples of this literary branch. There is, however, little doubt that all these songs were not composed by one person, and a fierce dispute concerning the identity of the author or authors of these *padas* has been going on among Bengali critics and historians of literature for at least fifty years. There are considerable differences not only in the artistic perfection of the individual *padas* and their religious attitudes (many songs belonging to the so-called Sahajīya branch of Vishnuism), but also in the way the poet's name is given in the colophons; besides the mere name of Caṇḍidās, we find here the attributes Baṛu, Ādi, Dīna, Dvija etc. Most authors believe that Dīna Caṇḍidās, whose complete cycle (*pālāgān*) of *padas* has been found,¹²⁰ was a poet of mediocre talent from about the middle of the 17th century, according to Harekṛṣṇa Mukhopādhyāy¹²¹ a pupil of Narottam Dās, and had nothing to do with the great poet of the same name. The greatest difficulty is connected with the questions as to whether the great *padakartā* called Caṇḍidās was identical with the author of the Śrīkṛṣṇa-kīrtan, and whether the Sahajīya songs preserved under his name were written by him as well.

We cannot go into the details of this complicated problem which was very well summed up by Asitkumār Bandyopādhyāy.¹²² Let us just mention one of the most significant points—the fact that, on the one hand, we know from Caitanya's biographies that the Great Saint enjoyed the *padas* not only of Vidyāpati, but also of Caṇḍidās, but that, on the other, the spirit of the Śrīkṛṣṇa-kīrtan was much against the conceptions of Caitanya. Dineschandra Sen had “no doubts whatsoever”¹²³ that there was only one Caṇḍidās preceding Caitanya and that the difference between his epic and his *padas* resulted from the inner development of the poet. More probable, however, seems to be the opinion of Asitkumār Bandyopādhyāy that they were two different persons of the same name and that the number of the poets named Caṇḍidās was at least four: 1) Baṛu Caṇḍidās, the author of the Śrīkṛṣṇa-kīrtan, 2) the pre-Caitanya *padakartā* Baṛu or Ādi Caṇḍidās (the attribute Ādi, meaning “the first,” “the original,” having been added later) whose *padas* were enjoyed by Caitanya and who was probably the author of no more than 40–50 *padas* preserved under his name till today, 3) Dīna Caṇḍidās mentioned above, and 4) a Sahajīya Caṇḍidās of a later period.

However it may be the early *padakartā* Caṇḍidās is rightly claimed by many to be one of the greatest Bengali poets. The smooth and natural melody of his verse, inimitable in any translation, reveals his inborn genius. His poetic diction is very simple but effective. With a minimum of similes and metaphors he conveys the intense emotions of Rādhā, her self-abandoned love and im-

das, the Rebel Poet-priest of Bengal, translated by DEBEN BHATTACHARYA, London 1967.

¹²⁰ Edited, in two volumes, by MANÍNDRAMOHAN BASU, Calcutta 1935.

¹²¹ ASITKUMĀR BANDYOPĀDHYĀY, BSI II, p. 613.

¹²² Ibid., pp. 578–626.

¹²³ Ibid., p. 611.

mense sorrow after Krishna has left her. No wonder that he was so highly appreciated not only by Caitanya but also by Rūpa Gosvāmī, the greatest theoretician of Vaishnava literature.

Rūpa Gosvāmī, along with his brother Sanātan and his nephew Jīva the greatest representative of the Brindaban school of Vaishnavism, deeply influenced the post-Caitanya Bengali *padas* by his Sanskrit book on poetics entitled *Ujjvalanīlamāṇi*.¹²⁴ With a typically Indian sense for system and classification he categorized, divided and subdivided the “subject-matters” of the *padas* and laid down rules of how the devotion to Krishna should be expressed. For the first (and the last) time here, Bengali literature, we had better say a branch of it, was offered a written normative aesthetic canon to follow, though formulated in Sanskrit and thus not immediately applicable. Even then, however, there were apparent differences between the poems of ancient Sanskrit poets writing under the strict surveillance of the *alaṃkārikas*, and the Bengali *padas* respecting the guidance of the *Ujjvalanīlamāṇi*. A true connoisseur (*rāsika*) of Sanskrit poetry had to know the rules of poetics rather intimately to be able to appreciate the qualities of Sanskrit *kāvya*-poetry. But there is little doubt that the masses of Bengali Vaishnavas, who truly enjoyed the *padas* during their *kīrtan* performances, had practically no idea of Rūpa Gosvāmī’s rules and prescriptions. As the bulk of the *padas* preserved until today shows most clearly, it was not the formal perfection which was appreciated in the first place, but the emotional intensity and the ability of the poet to express the listeners’ devotion and love of their God.

To an objective and unbiased modern reader very many *padas* appear to be simply love poetry, without any religious implications; one may remember the attitude of modern Western readers towards the Song of Songs, as a close parallel. We must not, of course, forget that it was a religious impetus which brought them into existence. But, as observed by Alokrañjan Dāśgupta and Debīprasād Bandyopādhyāy, “the aim of Vaishnava poets was to let shine the light of divine life through the medium of human life. The lamp was earthen but its light referred to the life-deity.”¹²⁵ Or, in Dineshchandra Sen’s words: “It is a curious literature. It deals with human passions mainly, of the most platonic sort and has always a door open heavenwards.”¹²⁶

When reading these *padas*, the modern reader sometimes cannot help feeling that there might be more of a personal and subjective involvement of the poet in these songs than mere religious devotion. Let us remember that there was no secular love poetry in Bengali at that period. Did not the *padas*, singing of the Krishna-Rādhā love, act as a kind of substitute for it, in the sense that the poets sometimes used this subject to express their own secular and earthly erotic feelings through this medium?

¹²⁴ Edited, e.g., by HIRENDRANĀRĀYAṆ MUKHOPĀDHYĀY, Calcutta s.d.

¹²⁵ BSR, p. 75.

¹²⁶ DINESH CHANDRA SEN, HBL, p. 543.

In Caitanya's time there started a mighty heyday of *pada* literature, both in Bengali and in Brajabuli. Among the contemporaries of the Great Saint, Murāri Gupta, though renowned especially for his Sanskrit writings, composed *padas* in Bengali too. Similarly Narahari Sarkār, the author of two Sanskrit books, and Bāsudeb Ghoṣ excelled in composing *padas*, dealing, for the first time, with the divine life (*līlā*) of Caitanya. The extant *padas* composed by them, however, are comparatively few in number. It was not till a few decades later that this poetic form found two of its greatest masters in Balarām Dās and Jñānadās.

There were evidently more poets using the name of Balarām¹²⁷ in the colophons of their songs, but the *padas* composed by the "original" poet of this name in the 16th century are marked by certain characteristic traits. Asitkumār Bandyopādhyāy is doubtless right in pointing to "sincerity and inner convincingness"¹²⁸ as his main qualities, and to his *padas* on Krishna's childhood as his best achievements. Seldom do we find so beautiful expressions of the anxiety of the loving mother Yaśodā for her child Krishna as in Balarām's songs.

Like Balarām, Jñānadās,¹²⁹ born in the village Kandra in Burdwan, was a follower of Nityānanda and wrote in Brajabuli and Bengali. Some critics appreciate his Brajabuli very high,¹³⁰ others prefer his Bengali verse. "When the poet put aside the eye-glasses of artificial poetic artistry and the decorativeness of Brajabuli and sang of happiness and sorrows of Rādhā and Krishna in a pastoral tune, he was able to rapture the heart of his listeners," says Asit Bandyopādhyāy.¹³¹ Jñānadās has always been considered, side by side with Caṇḍidās and Gobindadās, one of the greatest representatives of the *pada*-poetry in Bengal. All anthologies include a larger number of his *padas*, dealing, to a lesser extent, with Caitanya's life, but mostly with various episodes of the Krishna-Rādhā legend and concentrating mainly on the love between the divine hero and his beloved. Jñānadās was a worthy follower of Caṇḍidās and the first to match his poetic talent. As observed by Alokrañjan Dāśgupta and Debīprasād Bandyopādhyāy, Caṇḍidās' emotions are turned into passion in Jñānadās.¹³²

My eyes flow in tears because of his beauty, my mind is charmed by his virtues,
All my limbs weep because of all his limbs,
My heart weeps desiring the touch of his heart,
I find no rest because of my love.¹³³

¹²⁷ Balarāmer padābali, ed. by BRAHMACĀRI AMĀRCAITANYA, Calcutta 1955.

¹²⁸ ASITKUMĀR BANDYOPĀDHYĀY, BSI II, p. 683.

¹²⁹ Jñānadāser padābali, ed. by HAREKṚṢṆA MUKHOPĀDHYĀY and ŚRĪKUMĀR BANDYOPĀDHYĀY, Calcutta 1956.

¹³⁰ E.g. Dinesh Chandra Sen.

¹³¹ ASITKUMĀR BANDYOPĀDHYĀY, BSI II, p. 705.

¹³² BSR, p. 80.

¹³³ Baiṣṇab-padābali, ed. cit., p. 28.

Both Rādhā and Krishna, their hearts overflowing with love and anxiety lest they should lose it, speak through Jñānadās' verses in words charged with deep-felt emotion which are remarkably "modern," in a way. "There is a difference of almost four centuries between the time of Jñānadās and our period—a difference of mentality, life and heart. And yet, I don't know why, we can hear words of the life of a man of today in Jñānadās' *padas*. As if the poet, painting the image of Rādhā and Krishna and their all-human sorrows in golden lines, has surpassed the boundaries of space and time. He is human in his sentiments and modern in his art."¹³⁴

An important landmark in the development of Vaishnava *padas* was the famous gathering of all prominent Vaishnavas in Kheturi, with Narottam Dās as the main initiator. It was obviously held sometime in 1582–4¹³⁵ and all prominent Vaishnavas of the time were present, with Narottam Dās, Śyāmānanda, Brṇḍāban Dās, Locandās, Advaita Ācārya, Raghunandan and others heading the gathering. This two-days' festival gave rise to regular *kīrtan*-singing, enriched by new musical techniques by Narottam Dās, himself a well-known composer of *padas*. Among his songs, mention must be made of the so-called *prārthanāpad* or prayer-songs.

A definite culmination in the development of Vaishnava *padas* is represented by Gobindadās Kabirāj,¹³⁶ born in Khanda sometime between 1520–30 and living till the first quarter of the 17th century. He was originally a Śākta, but probably since 1577 became a devoted Vaishnava and one of the most famous poets of the period. Though certainly not all *padas* preserved under his name were composed by him, he left a vast number of songs, mostly in Brajabuli, marked by an exceptional poetic skill. He followed Rūpa Gosvāmī's Ujjvalanilamaṇi in two ways. His verse strives after "artistic" perfection along the lines indicated by the great theoretician, i.e. in diction, style, euphony and poetic images, and excels in melodiousness such as is seldom reached in poetry. Besides, Gobindadās "covers" the whole Krishna-Rādhā legend, as divided by Rūpa Gosvāmī into individual sections, and a complete *pālāgān* (series of the legend) can be compiled of his songs. In comparison to Caṇḍīdās, he is far more sophisticated and his poetry must have been appreciated more by intellectuals than by simple devoted Vaishnava masses of the day.

Sukumar Sen is, however, doubtless right in pointing to a danger hidden in Gobindadās' poetic attitude: "Govindadās' songs are resonant with the harmony of sound and sense, although they are lacking in variety as well as in depth of feeling. In a way Govindadās' success led to a speedy degeneration of Vaishnav poetry as the direction of appeal was diverted from the heart to the

¹³⁴ ASITKUMĀR BANDYOPĀDHYĀY, BSI II, p. 710.

¹³⁵ DINESH CHANDRA SEN, HBLI, p. 549, gives the year 1504 which is utterly impossible.

¹³⁶ Cf. BIMĀNBIHĀRĪ MAJUMDĀR, Gobindadāser padābali o tāmhār yug, Calcutta. Editions are many, e.g., Gobindadāser padābali, ed. by KĀLIDĀS NĀTH, Calcutta 1902.

ear. The succeeding generations of writers of Brajabuli songs tried only to imitate him."¹³⁷

Though a large number of poets tried their skill in composing *padas* about Krishna as well as Caitanya, in the 17th and the 18th centuries, there were very few among them whose contribution to this literary genre was more than a mere continuation and repetition of what had been sung before in a better way. I shall, therefore, mention only a few of them in short.

Gobindadās Cakrabartī wrote mostly in Bengali, whereas Rāyśekhara composed his poems in Brajabuli, obviously following the example of Gobindadās Kabirāj in his technique. Basantarāy or Rāybasanta was a disciple of Narottam Dās and wrote in both languages. Kabirañjan, Kabiballabh and Jagadānanda belonged to the 17th century and there are a few songs bearing their names which show signs of a true poetic talent.

The *pada* poetry represents a literary stream which continued to flow up to the present day. Among mediaeval Bengali literary genres and forms, it occupies a very important place, being, as a matter of fact, the only purely lyrical means of expression of emotions, though garbed in religious dress and mostly conventionalized by its purpose and circumstances of "introduction." On the other hand, this particular genre strongly influenced Bengali folk-poetry, more than one of whose sections have been closely connected with it till today.

It suffices to skim the pages of the large collection of Bengali folk-songs edited by Āśutoṣ Bhaṭṭācārya¹³⁸ in order to see how many genres and forms of Bengali folk-poetry have been inspired either exclusively or at least predominantly by the Krishna-Rādhā theme.¹³⁹ In a way, these songs form a counterpart of the *padas*, especially in East Bengal (nowadays Bangladesh) where, as the observant reader might have noticed, there were rather few *padakartās*. The individual episodes of the Rādhā-Krishna legend are here the subject of innumerable wedding songs (*bīyer gān* or *meyeli gān*), of pastoral songs (*rākhālī gān*), of the peculiar *ghāṭu gān* of the Mymensingh district, sung (and danced, too) by boys dressed and decorated as girls, and of collective *sāri gān*, to which belong also songs to be sung in chorus during the boat-race (*bāic*). In various tunes and textual variants, the Krishna-Rādhā subject is treated again and again, of course without the *bhakti*-attitude, so typical of the *padas*.

While introducing several samples of *sāri gāns* of this type, Āśutoṣ Bhaṭṭācārya observed: "It is necessary to keep in mind that all singers of these songs in East Bengal are Muslims, only exceptionally one finds here a low-caste Hindu. Therefore these songs are composed by Muslims and sung by Muslim singers. But in almost all cases, their subject is either the Krishna-Rādhā story or that of how Nimāi (i.e. Caitanya) left his home."¹⁴⁰ There can indeed be hardly a

¹³⁷ SUKUMAR SEN, HBL, p. 111.

¹³⁸ ĀŚUTOṢ BHAṬṬĀCĀRYA, Baṅgiya lok-saṅgīt ratnākara, 2 vols., Calcutta 1966-7.

¹³⁹ Cf. also DINESH CHANDRA SEN, Folk Literature of Bengal, Calcutta 1920.

¹⁴⁰ ĀŚUTOṢ BHAṬṬĀCĀRYA, op. cit., p. 1920.

better proof of the immense popularity of the songs of this type than the fact that they have remained alive even centuries after the majority of the inhabitants of this part of Bengal had accepted Islam. The influence of Vaishnavism on the minds and hearts of the Bengalis, from the uppermost circles to the lowest masses, was indeed immense.

A PERIOD OF CONTINUATION

With Gobindadās Kabirāj and his contemporaries we have arrived at the 17th century which, along with the first half of the 18th, forms what may justly be called a period of continuation in Bengali literature. Essentially the same that has been said on the later *padās* may apply to the majority of the works composed in this period—adaptations of Sanskrit epics and *purāṇas*, numerous *maṅgal-kāvyas* and various treatises. Since the beginning of the Mughal rule in Bengal, at the end of the 16th century, a gradual but steady decline is to be observed in all aspects of Bengali life, not excluding literature.

During the successors of Akbar the Great, Jahangir (1605–1627), Shahjahan (1627–1658) and Aurangzeb (1658–1707), the whole of Bengal was drawn out of its relative seclusion and isolation. The subadars and nawabs of the Mughals opened the door between this region and the rest of India in both directions. On the one hand, more and more officials, soldiers, merchants and Muslim preachers were entering the country to rule it, exploit it, and turn it into a part of Dāru’l-islām, the World of Islamic Peace. They were bringing along not only their religion, but also their languages, Persian and Urdu, and their literary traditions. On the other hand, all wealth of Bengal started to flow out, in the form of heavy taxes and payments, to contribute to the luxury and splendour of the Mughal courts and the palaces of their vassals. Moreover, Portuguese pirates were looting the southern parts of Bengal (it is not surprising that even yet the Portuguese word *hārmādā*, originally meaning the army, stands for “bandit, pirat” in Bengali), and neither did the arrival of the French and especially the British, represented by their almighty East India Company, contribute to an improvement of the conditions of life of the Bengali people. In 1690, Job Charnock settled down on the Hoogli, bought three villages and founded Calcutta, destined to become the main centre of Bengal, within not too long a time.

Even the decline of the Mughal power, in the first half of the 18th century, did not help Bengal and its people to live in peace and prosperity. Just the opposite. Muršīdkuli Khān, though formally continuing to represent the Mughals, started a short-lived tradition of practically independent Nawabs, but neither he nor his successors used Bengal for anything else but their private enrichment. One of them, Sirājuddaulā, was defeated by the British, with arms and treason, at Plassey in 1757, and Bengal became actually a British colony, though it acquired this status formally only a century later.

It was in this period that the traditional Bengali Hindu society was shattered in its very roots. No single stratum of it was able to survive this period without far-reaching changes—for the worse, of course. The strong pressure of Islam resulted in turning more than a half of the population, especially in the eastern part of the country, into Muslims. It was mainly the lower strata of Hindu society which accepted the new creed; but the pressure on the rich zamindars was no less strong. The Hindu “nobility” was losing its former economic and political positions, the Brahmins their spiritual and cultural monopoly. Towards

the end of this period, more and more villagers started to move to Calcutta in the hope of finding there what their old homes offered no more—security and means of living.

No wonder that, under these circumstances, traditional literature suffered the same decline. This was certainly not an atmosphere to encourage new attempts, original and bold thinking and unprecedented spiritual adventures. The simple villager continued to worship his old deities, who offered at least an illusion of stability and reliability, in the same way as his forefathers did. There was Viṣṇu-Krishna offering everybody his all-embracing love and pity, Śiva to give fertility and rice, Caṇḍī to protect the weak, Manasā to avert the danger of snake-poison and a host of other gods and goddesses, including Śaṣṭhī to protect the new-born, Śītālā to cure small-pox, etc. But there was also the old dream of physical immortality and supernatural strength to be acquired by mysterious practices and ancient cults, which passed through a period of renaissance in the Nāth community and found an expression in Nāth literature.

There appeared, however, also new components in this traditional pattern, brought about by and resulting from the impact of Islam and its culture. The wonderful ability of Hinduism to incorporate foreign elements into its own system and to create new syntheses gave rise to a mixed deity, Satya-Pīr, half-Hindu and half-Muslim. More than one section of Hindu literature experienced the influence of Sufi mysticism. And above all, there appeared the first attempts at a non-religious, secular literature, based on non-Bengali models brought from abroad. We shall mention them, in some detail, later on, after giving at least a short survey of the traditional trends and their new continuations.

Apart from the Vaishnava *padas*, described in the preceding chapter, various other Vaishnava books were written in the 17th and the 18th centuries, either reiterations of the Krishna-Rādhā legend or, more often, biographies of various Vaishnava saints. Thus the life of Advaita was depicted in Haricaraṇḍās' Advaitamaṅgal and Naraharidās' Advaitabilās, that of his wife in Loknāthdās' Sītācaritra (The Personality of Sītā) and Bīṣṇudās' Sītāguṇakadamba (The Lotus of Sītā's Virtues), etc. Most important, in this branch, was the Prembilās¹⁴¹ (Pleasures of Love) by Nityānandadās, containing not only life-stories of many renowned Vaishnavas, but also much new information on the Vaishnava community and its development in the preceding centuries.

Of the new renderings of the Krishna-Rādhā legend, the Haribaṁśa (Hari's Dynasty) by Bhabānanda must be mentioned, which is remarkable by its many lyrical stanzas of considerable poetic beauty.

Numerous were also the new adaptations of old Sanskrit books, especially of the epics and the *purāṇas*. Some of them have been mentioned already, first of all the extremely popular Mahābhārat by Kāśīrām Dās. Apart from this book, however, no Bengali rendering excelled in any particular way.

¹⁴¹ Edited by RĀMDEB MIŚRA, Baharampur s.d.

The *maṅgal*-literature was enriched, in this period, by a large number of works. There is, however, little need of describing them at large. With very few exceptions, they retell the stories connected with the cult of Manasā and Caṇḍī, seldom letting a more original tone resound.

Among the epics on the snake goddess Manasā, it is necessary only to draw attention to the interesting "anthologies" which became popular especially in East Bengal. The whole epic was put together of parts composed by different poets, the number of poets being either six (the so-called Ṣaṭkabi Manasāmaṅgal) or, more frequently, twenty-two (Bāiśkabi Manasāmaṅgal).¹⁴² Of the individual books, that by Ketakādās-Kṣemānanda,¹⁴³ composed towards the end of the 17th century, deserves more attention. Some historians consider it the best Manasāmaṅgal ever written, but the fact that the poet obviously imitated Mukundarām cannot be overlooked. He was, however, a skilful narrator, able to retell his story (with some new variations) in a very compact and smooth way.

The new renderings of the Caṇḍīmaṅgal are less remarkable, be it that by Dvija Rāmdēb of Caṭṭagrām, entitled Abhayāmaṅgal,¹⁴⁴ or another by Mukṭārām Sen,¹⁴⁵ composed in 1747. There appeared, however, somewhat more novel versions of the divine deeds of Caṇḍī based especially on the Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa, e.g. the Caṇḍikābijay (The Victory of Caṇḍī) by Dvija Kamallocaṇ,¹⁴⁶ or the Durgāmaṅgal by the blind poet Bhabānīprasād Rāy¹⁴⁷ of Mymensingh.

The *maṅgalkāvyas* did not, however, include only works in honour of the goddesses Manasā and Caṇḍī. Local, mostly probably pre-Aryan, cults gave also rise to several other epic songs elaborating, in essentially the same manner, legends connected with a number of other deities fighting for their recognition and enforcing their worship in the world. Among the most ancient ones are the Dharmamaṅgals, celebrating the somewhat obscure and doubtless mixed god Dharmarāj, in whom some scholars attempted to discover the Buddha and others, with more justification, the Vedic god Varuṇa as well as a number of other deities of indigenous origin. Though the respective legends are obviously much older, the first literary version of this *maṅgal* appeared as late as the 17th century and thus properly belongs to the present chapter.

The cult of Dharma, called frequently Dharmathākur, is a local cult of the historical region of Rāṛh, i.e. the middle part of West Bengal. Folk tradition considers a certain Rāmāi Paṇḍit to be the founder of the cult and there exist not only numerous legends connected with his name (his epithet *Ḍompaṇḍit*

¹⁴² Bāiś kabir Manasāmaṅgal, ed. by ĀSUTOṢ BHATṬĀCĀRYA, Calcutta 1954.

¹⁴³ Edited by YATĪNDRAMOHAN BHATṬĀCĀRYA, Calcutta 1943. English translation of the Behulā-Lakhindar part, see The Thief of Love. Bengali Tales from Court and Village, edited and translated by EDWARD C. DIMOCK, JR., Chicago 1963.

¹⁴⁴ Edited by ĀSUTOṢ DĀS, Calcutta 1957.

¹⁴⁵ Sārada-maṅgal, ed. by ĀBDUL KARIM, Calcutta 1917.

¹⁴⁶ Edited by PAṆCĀNAN SARKĀR, Rangpur 1909.

¹⁴⁷ Edited by BYOMKEŚ MUSTAPHĪR, Calcutta.

indicating his connection with the lowest strata of Hindu caste society), but also literary works ascribed to him, especially the *Śūnyapurāṇ*¹⁴⁸ (or *Āgampurāṇ*). This is, however, obviously a compilation of both older and more recent parts. A relatively large number of versions of the *Dharmamaṅgal* were composed in the 17th and the 18th centuries, elaborating the story of Lāusen, a protégé of Dharmatḥākur. Let us sum it up in short:

Lāusen, the son of the king Karnasen, was born after his mother Rañjābati had won the favour of the god Dharma by a penance. The boy stands under the protection of the mighty god and can therefore escape all the attempts of his wicked uncle Mahāmad (Māhudyā) to kill him. Lāusen performs wonderful deeds, defeats men and beasts and overcomes even the hardest trial by making the sun rise in the west. Finally he defeats his uncle Mahāmad and spreads the cult of Dharma.

Though it is not at all easy to trace the individual figures of the story and its individual components back to their origin, the composite character of the legend is beyond doubt and so is the existence of a very old kernel. The cult of Dharma, however, must have been looked down upon, for long centuries, as it was only in the 17th century that the first written version of it appeared. The oldest elaboration extant is that by Rūprām Cakrabartī,¹⁴⁹ probably from the middle of the century; it contains also much information on the life of the poet and on how he was asked by Dharma himself to compose a *Dharmamaṅgal*.¹⁵⁰ He did so in a readable style, endowing his characters with life and individuality not often met with in this particular branch of Bengali literature.

Among the later authors of the *Dharmamaṅgal* (sometimes called also *Anādyamaṅgal* or *Anādimaṅgal*), two poets of the 18th century must be mentioned, Ghanarām Cakrabartī,¹⁵¹ whose book written in 1711 excels in female characters, and Mānikrām Gānguli,¹⁵² probably from the last decades of the 18th century.

No less popular were various 17th–18th centuries elaborations of myths centring round Śiva and Pārvatī, and based either on the ancient purāṇic tradition or on less orthodox folk narratives and legends. They were often called Śibāyan, as that by Śaṅkar Kabicandra, born in the middle of the 17th century in Vishnupur. His work, composed about 1680, has not been preserved completely but the part which is available, the *Marcchadharā* (i.e. *Matsyadharā*, The Catch of the Fish) reveals the prevailing influence of folk tradition. This work remained, however, in the shade of the giant Śibāyan¹⁵³ by Rāmkrṣṇa Kabicandra (1618–1684), which is remarkable in many respects. In a way, it represents the nearest approach to an original Bengali *purāṇa*, synthetising both

¹⁴⁸ Edited by NAGENDRANĀTH BASU, Calcutta 1908.

¹⁴⁹ Edited by SUKUMĀR SEN, Calcutta 1944.

¹⁵⁰ In more detail, see SUKUMĀR SEN, HBL, pp. 136–40.

¹⁵¹ Edited by PIYŪṢKĀNTI MAHĀPĀTRA, Calcutta.

¹⁵² Edited by HARAPRASĀD ŚĀSTRĪ and DĪNEŚCANDRA SEN, Calcutta 1906.

¹⁵³ Edited by DĪNEŚCANDRA BHATṬĀCĀRYA, Calcutta 1956.

the classical tradition and various folk sources (e.g. in the descriptions of the daily life of Śiva and Pārvatī). Its author was a good poet and narrator, not hesitating to interconnect certain parts of his verse epic by short prosaic portions—obviously the first attempts at literary prose existing in Bengali. Rāmkrṣṇa was well-read in Sanskrit literature and his ability to utilize different sources and to transform them into well-integrated parts of his book is admirable.

Another noteworthy version of the same kind is the Śībasamkīrtan¹⁵⁴ by Rāmeśvar Bhaṭṭācārya written probably in 1711. Its author was the “court-poet” of a zamindar and was considered to be one of the best poets of the 18th century. In spite of his somewhat excessive predilection for alliterations, he was a skilled versifier. His book describes the domestic life of Śiva, a poor farmer who had to strive hard for livelihood, with many elements apparently influenced by the poet’s own milieu and personal experience.

Another fruit of an old tradition, the narratives centring round the so-called Nāth-cult, cannot be regarded as *maṅgalkāvyas* in the proper sense of the term. There is no deity in them to fight for recognition among gods and men, as a matter of fact there are almost no gods at all. It is rather surprising to see that this subject which, in its origin, goes back to very remote centuries and must have been retaining its popularity in certain social groups during all the time, had not found any literary expression in Bengali till the 17th century.

The very basis of the peculiar and highly interesting Nāth-cult is the same human desire for physical immortality and utmost perfection of the body and its senses, which may be traced back through the long process of development of Indian thought to Patañjali’s Yogaśāstra and other books of this kind. The idea that it is possible, by means of penance and yogic exercises, to increase the potentialities of the human body and to perfect it, till unthinkable abilities are developed and immortality is achieved, must have been even older and continued, in the whole of India, to find various expressions in numerous schools and doctrines. Gods had no place in these systems, but some of them were incorporated, probably later on, as a sort of teachers (*guru*) and advisors. Thus Śiva was proclaimed the Ādiguru or Ādināth, i.e. the First Preceptor of the doctrine, in those branches of this ideology which spread in the Eastern regions of India and, at least in part, probably originated in Bengal.

Two cycles of stories developed in connection with the Nāth-cult, the main hero of the first being Gorakṣanāth (or Gorakhnāth) and of the second the queen Maynāmatī and her son Gopīcandra (or Gobindacandra). Each of them is treated separately in books none of which is older than the 17th century.

There are various versions of the Gorakṣabijay (The Victory of Gorakṣanāth) and it is impossible to find out who was the earliest author to give the story its extant literary form. The names of Śekh Fayzullā,¹⁵⁵ Kabīndradās, Śyāmdās

¹⁵⁴ RĀMEŚVAR BHAṬṬĀCĀRYA, Śībāyan, Calcutta 1903.

¹⁵⁵ Śekh Fayzullā, Gorakṣa-bijay, ed. by ĀBDUL KARĪM, Calcutta 1917.

Sen,¹⁵⁶ Bhīmsen Rāy¹⁵⁷ and other poets appear in colophons, none of them being more than a mere name. The old story retold in these versions runs, in a very abridged summary, as follows:

It is only the Ādināth Śīva who possesses the *mahājñān*, the mysterious formula of immortality. He wants to share it with his wife Pārvatī, but by deceit his disciple Miṇanāth succeeds in overhearing it. He is cursed, however, by Śīva and forgets it and Pārvatī, revenging the insolence, makes him succumb to the seductions of feminine beauty in the Kingdom of Women. Miṇanāth's disciple Gorakṣanāth decides to save his *guru* and disguised as a girl dancer he helps him to cast off the spell and regain his previous spiritual faculties.

The story is well known outside Bengal. It was the subject, for instance, of Vidyāpati's Maithili play Gorakṣavijaya from the very beginning of the 15th century. Bengali versions do not conceal their folk origin. Asitkumār Bandyopādhyāy is right in stating: "Though we cannot include the Gorakhabijay in folk literature, in the philological sense of the term, it is folk mentality which forms its basis; the influence of folk culture is much stronger in its composition, descriptions, mentality and atmosphere than that of classical culture."¹⁵⁸

The other Nāth-story, that of Maynāmatī and Gobindacandra, is obviously of Bengali origin. Though known outside Bengal too, it is everywhere connected with East Bengal. Here again, Bengali versions preserved in manuscripts do not reach back to a period before the 17th century, though the legend must be much older. Among its literary versions, at least three should be noted: the Gobindacandrī gīt¹⁵⁹ by Durlabh Mallik, the Maynāmatīgīt¹⁶⁰ by Bhabānī Dās, and the Gopīcānder sanyās by Ābdul Sukur Mahammad.¹⁶¹ As in the former case, nothing or very little is known of the authors. It is here even more obvious that the story had formed part of orally transmitted folk literature. It is testified to by a number of versions preserved in this way up to the present day and put down in writing by modern scholars.¹⁶²

Jālandhari (or Jālandharipā) was another disciple of Śīva. Among those whom he initiated into the mysterious doctrine was not only his disciple Kāna (or Kānupā) but also the queen Maynāmatī who thus became a Jñāna-ḍākinī. After the death of her husband Māṇikcandra (hence the title of some folk versions), she bore a son Gobindacandra (or Gopīcandra); after coming of age, this prince resisted to be initiated into the cult and preferred a lustful life, even burying Jālandhari, who had become his teacher, alive. Just as Gorakṣanāth saved his *guru* in the previous story, Jālandhari's disciple Kānupā came to

¹⁵⁶ Mincetan, ed. by NALINIKĀNTA BHATṬAŚĀLĪ, Dacca 1915.

¹⁵⁷ Gorkhabijay, ed. by PAṆCĀNAN MAṆḌAL, Calcutta 1941.

¹⁵⁸ ASITKUMĀR BANDYOPĀDHYĀY, BSI III, p. 385.

¹⁵⁹ Edited by ŚIBCANDRA ŚIL, Calcutta 1901.

¹⁶⁰ Edited by NALINIKĀNTA BHATṬAŚĀLĪ and BAIKUṆṬHANĀTH DATTA, Dacca 1914.

¹⁶¹ Edited by NALINIKĀNTA BHATṬAŚĀLĪ, Dacca 1925.

¹⁶² E.g. GRIERSON'S Māṇikcandra rājār gān, found in Rangpur and edited in 1878.

rescue his teacher. He made Gobindacandra open the grave, and after the anger of Jālandhari had been calmed down, the prince humbly and readily accepted initiation and became an ascetic.

Both these Nāth-stories are full of fairy-tale elements and supernatural phenomena and represent, in a way, the extreme of non-realistic trends in Bengali literature. They are fruits of an almost unbounded imagination, withdrawing from the hard facts of life. No wonder that in the atmosphere of the 17th and the 18th centuries which for most inhabitants of the country were a period of the utmost poverty, insecurity and misery, their attraction grew, because it offered an escape from the facts of everyday life which were not at all bright and pleasant.

On the other hand it is a pity that these stories have never found a Mukundarām or a Bijay Gupta to write a variant of a more perfected form. But obviously this could not have happened. By their basically "atheistic" character and general tendency, they were too remote from the main trends of Hinduism to gain full recognition and to be admitted among those branches of literature which had the general approval.

Let us conclude this part concerning the 17th and 18th-century fruits of older traditions by mentioning one of the most interesting poets of the period, Kṛṣṇarām Dās,¹⁶³ born about 1655 in the vicinity of today's Calcutta. He did not excel particularly by his poetic mastery and was little more than a mediocre poet, as far as the form of his books is concerned. What made him so interesting a personality, however, is his purely "professional" attitude towards literature which appears from the fact that he wrote five different *maṅgalkāvyas* each devoted to another and previously not particularly favoured deity.

The Ṣaṣṭhīmaṅgal, the Śītalāmaṅgal and the Lakṣmīmaṅgal, celebrating the goddess of new-born children, the divine protectress from small-pox and other diseases, and the goddess of domestic happiness, respectively, are based on old *brata-kathās* used by women in praying to these deities, and are little more than attempts to give these old stories a more refined literary form. Kṛṣṇarām Dās' two other books are of more interest, being reflections of new tendencies and testimonies to a more recent development in Bengali culture.

The Rāymaṅgal (composed in 1686) centres around the tiger-god Dakṣiṇrāy (or Dakṣiṇer Rāy, i.e. the Lord of the South) worshipped till today in South and West Bengal. His cult is spread even among Muslims who call him Sonārāy, Bāghāi, Barakhān, Gāzīsāheb or Gāzī Khān. The legend about the spread of his cult, as given by Kṛṣṇarām Dās, is not very original, being, in its main motives, an obvious imitation of the Dhanapati-Śrīmanṭa story of the Caṇḍīmaṅgal. Its most interesting part, from the modern point of view, is the inserted narrative on how the two divine tiger chieftains, Dakṣiṇrāy and Bara Gāzī Khān, fought

¹⁶³ Cf. HARAPRASĀD ŚĀSTRĪ, Kabi Kṛṣṇarāmer sāhitya, Calcutta 1893. His collected works were edited by SATYANĀRĀYAṆ BHATTĀCĀRYA and published by the University of Calcutta, under the title Kabi Kṛṣṇarām Dāser granthābali.

with each other till they were reconciled by Krishna who appeared clad half as a Hindu, half as a Muslim.

The Islamic influence is even more noticeable in the *Kālikāmaṅgal* which was Kṛṣṇarām Dās' first book (1676). Though motivated as a true *maṅgalkāvyā*, with the goddess Kālī as a *deus ex machina* to help her protégé Sundar, the story seems to be a mere "Hinduization" of an originally secular love romance, apparently of non-Bengali origin.

The prince Sundar tries to win the hand of beautiful Bidyā, the daughter of the king Birsimpha, and worships Kālī to help him. Disguised as a gardener he succeeds, with the support of the goddess, to gain secret access to the bedroom of the princess and to win her love. Their amorous affair comes to be known after Bidyā has become pregnant; Sundar is caught and is to be executed. Once again the goddess Kālī helps him; he is identified as a king's son and allowed to marry Bidyā.

As rightly noted by Asitkumār Bandyopādhyāy, the "godly part" of the story may be easily removed without essentially affecting the narrative—and what remains is an entirely secular love romance of a character previously altogether unknown in mediaeval Bengali literature. Kṛṣṇarām Dās was probably not the first Bengali poet to write it down. He may have been preceded by a Muslim poet Sābirid (or Sāh Birid) Khān from Caṭṭagrām as well as by a Dviija Śrīdhar whose book, however, has been preserved only in fragments. Neither of them mentions the goddess Kālī at all. The fact that Sābirid Khān knew Sanskrit well led to the theory that his story of Bidyā and Sundar is an adaptation of some unknown Sanskrit original. Worth mentioning is also the similarity of the seduction and release motives of this romance with the well-known story of Bilhaṇa, the Kashmiri author of the Sanskrit *Caurapañcāśikā* (Fifty Stanzas of the Thief) of the 11th century.

However that may be, the versions without any "divine intervention" as well as those incorporating the goddess Kālī are a support to the theory that during the whole pre-modern period of Bengali literature secular subjects were on one hand not easily tolerated in what was considered high literature, but that on the other hand a mere external religious garb was sufficient to allow them to enter this domain. In the 17th and the 18th centuries, however, the firm Brahmanical control over literature slackened to such an extent that it was no more able to continue suppressing such secular genres as effectively as before. And it was in that time that even Muslim poets asserted themselves in Bengali literature and founded the so-called Arakan school in Southeast Bengal.

It is not at all easy to appreciate the contribution of Muslim poets to Bengali literature in the premodern era. There is no doubt that long before the 17th century, the so-called Arakan Kingdom of Lower Burma had close contacts with Bengal and that it was influenced by Bengali culture to such a degree that Bengali was considered, at the Rosang court of Arakan, a kind of prestige language. The Muslims of Bengal occupied the posts of generals and high courtiers and under their patronage, Bengali poets, mostly from the near-by Chitta-

gong area, composed many books, naturally often different from those in vogue among their Hindu countrymen. Instead of the purāṇic Hindu tradition and that of indigenous cults incorporated into Hinduism, they preferred Arabic-Persian sources and models, both for religious Islamic literature and for purely secular love romances and fairy-tales.

Almost two hundred Muslim poets are mentioned in the Catalogue of Bengali Manuscripts compiled by Munsī Ābdul Karīm¹⁶⁴—but it is extremely hard to say much on the time they belonged to. With a few exceptions, their works have not yet been edited and thus remain inaccessible to research. On the other hand, they are the subject of a few monographs devoted to the Muslim branch of Bengali literature, e.g. by Sukumar Sen,¹⁶⁵ Enamul Huq¹⁶⁶ or Muhammad Mansuruddin.¹⁶⁷ In the histories written by Muslim Bengali scholars, it is only natural to find a comprehensible tendency to assign the oldest Muslim Bengali poets to centuries as remote as possible. Thus Enamul Huq (and following him, also Muhammad Mansuruddin) enumerates three poets living, in his opinion, in the 15th century: Śāh Muhammad Sagir, the author of the Islamic story Yusuf-Zulekhā, Jainuddin, whose Rasulbijay (The Victory of the Prophet) is based on Persian legends on the Prophet Muhammad, and Mojammel (spelled as Mujammil by Huq and Mansuruddin), the poet of three books, mostly of didactic-moralistic verse.

Many other Muslim poets are claimed, by the above-mentioned authors, to belong to the 16th century, a.o. Donāgāzī, the author of the love-romance Sayfulmuluk-Badiujjamāl, Muhammad Kabīr, the poet of the fairy-tale Madhumālātī, and especially Bāhrām Khān, whose Bengali version of the well-known Iranian legend of Laylī and Majnun (Laylī-Majnu) ranks among the best secular poetic narratives in pre-modern Bengali literature. The latter, however, may well justify the doubts about its alleged antiquity. As pointed out by its editor, Āhmad Śarīf,¹⁶⁸ there are on the one hand considerable discrepancies between historical facts and the poet's own words, and, on the other, even a mention of the Emperor Aurangzeb. The latter may be, of course, an interpolation by a later copyist—this has indeed been maintained—but there is no positive proof that the work really belongs to the 16th century and not to the post-Aurangzeb period, as many other historians of Bengali literature believe. It is still too early to say anything more definite about these problems. We must wait till at least the most important manuscripts are published and more detailed analyses made, before a more reliable chronology of the earlier Muslim Bengali poets can be compiled.

In the 17th century, however, rich contributions of Muslim poets to Bengali literature are beyond doubt. They are rather varied in contents, comprising

¹⁶⁴ Puthi-pariciti, ed. by ĀHMAD ŚARĪF, Dacca 1958.

¹⁶⁵ Islāmī Bāmlā sāhitya, Burdwan 1951.

¹⁶⁶ Muslim Bengali Literature. Karachi 1957.

¹⁶⁷ Bāmlā sāhitye muslim sādhanā. Dacca 1960.

¹⁶⁸ Lāylī-majnu, Dacca 1957, pp. 12–9.

not only Islamic religious treatises and adaptations of numerous romances, legends and fairy-tales of the Iranian-Arabic stock, but also Vaishnava *padas*. Among these poets, mention must be made of Muhammad Khān (living probably between 1580–1650), the author of seven books, e.g. the remarkable allegorical fairy-tale *Satya-Kali bibād sambād* (The Quarrel between Truth and Kali) from 1635, depicting the victory of Truth over Kalī, an embodiment of Vice. The main representatives of Muslim Bengali literature in that age, however, are Daulat Kāzī and Saiyād Ālāol.

Daulat Kāzī was a protégé of the general Āśraf Khān in Arakan and was born in the village of Sultānpur, in the vicinity of Chittagong. He was ordered by his patron to retell, in Bengali verse, a popular fairy-tale of Hindi origin, well-known from Hindi folklore and various other versions, viz. the story of King Lor and his two wives. He did it between 1621–38, but, dying prematurely, was not able to finish his book. His poem, bearing the double title *Lorcandrāṇī* and *Satī Maynā*,¹⁶⁹ was later finished by Ālāol.

The major part of Daulat Kāzī's book is an excellent narrative, with vivid characters and many details testifying not only to the poetic abilities of the author, but also to his power of observation. The subject is Hindu in the sense that its main characters belong to the Hindu community, and in spite of being a Muslim, Daulat Kāzī showed a remarkable knowledge of Hindu traditions and the Hindu way of life. The story tells of the King Lor who, though happily married to Maynā, falls in love with the beautiful princess Candrāṇī, kills her dwarf-husband in a battle, marries her and forgets his first wife. She bewails her lot, but resists all efforts to be seduced during the prolonged absence of her husband, and finally succeeds in bringing him back home with the help of her pet parrot.

The theme was foreign in origin and novel in its secularity, but Daulat Kāzī rendered it in a way that did not conceal his deep attachment to the Bengali tradition which he was firmly rooted in. His style and poetic diction synthesize, in a happy way, centuries-old traditions of Bengali narrative poetry and Krishnaite lyrics as well as the vast store of Bengali folk-poetry. The result is sometimes fascinating. I quote, as a short sample, a part of his description of Maynā :

How shall I describe all the charms of the girl ?
 She is like an embodied plaything of the Bodiless (God of Love).
 The full moon is ashamed of the golden lotus of her face,
 The lotus hides in water defeated by her.
 Her lively eyes are like a pair of petals of the blue lotus,
 The arrows from her gazelle-eyes drive the gazelle into bushes.
 What is a bow compared to her eyebrows of Madan's buds ?
 In shame conceals the God of Love his flowery arrows—
 The god has to remain hidden not to be ashamed.
 Honey is the speech of her nice lips,
 The jasmine-like row of her teeth shines like pearls . . .¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁹ Edited by SATYENDRANĀTH GHOṢĀL, Calcutta.

¹⁷⁰ Quoted in MANSURUDDIN, op. cit., p. 155.

“Daulat Kāzī changed the fairy-tale into a romance suited to mature minds,” says Asitkumār Bandyopādhyāy, “but Ālāol was not able to maintain this quality.”¹⁷¹ As far as the final part of Lorcanḍrāṇī and Satī Maynā is concerned, it is undoubtedly true; the part furnished by Ālāol in 1659 is indeed much inferior.

On the other hand, it cannot be denied that Saiyād Ālāol was a great poet, too, but his talents seem to have been better suited to adaptations and paraphrases in which he was able to make full use of his extraordinary knowledge and learning.

Saiyād Ālāol,¹⁷² born towards the end of the 16th century, was of noble origin, but as a youngster he was abducted by Portuguese pirats and sold as a soldier to the Arakanese. His poetic genius and talents as a linguist attracted the attention of various patrons and he soon became a court-poet in Morang. He lived long, suffering among other things a fifty-days imprisonment, and wrote at least six books, mostly free translations and adaptations of Persian, Arabic and Hindi originals. The most popular was his Padmābatī¹⁷³ (composed ca. 1646), a Bengali rendering of the Hindi Padmāvat by Malik Muhammad Jāyasī (16th century). For two of his works Ālāol used Nezāmī’s Persian originals—Haft peykar (Seven Portraits, Sapta paykār in Bengali) and Eskandarnāme (Book of Alexander, in Bengali Sekāndār-nāmā). Ālāol’s Sayfulmuluk-Badiujjamāl is a version of the Arabic love romance about the search of an Egyptian prince for a beautiful fairy-princess, and his Tohfā a collection of moralistic Islamic stanzas, based on the Persian book Tuhfātunnēsā by Šekh Iusuf Dihlavī (14th century).

It was not easy for a Muslim poet to be recognized by the Hindu-dominated Bengali society, in the subsequent era, but Ālāol did win distinction and general recognition. His diction was flawless and his style truly poetic. As a good narrator he was able to enlarge the thematic repertory of Bengali literature by attractive and widely read renderings of foreign sources and to invigorate the tendencies towards a definite secularization of Bengali poetry.

Both Daulat Kāzī and Ālāol proved their religious liberalism by composing a number of Vaishnava *padas*, just as many other of their contemporaries,¹⁷⁴ especially Saiyād Martujā, Nāsir Māmud and Ālirājā did. Others, however, preferred Islamic subjects, among them numerous versions of the emotionally moving description of the battle at Karbala, often bearing the title of Jaṅgā-nāmā (Book of Battle). But the oldest one is entitled Matulhosen (Death of Hussain) and was composed in 1645 by Muhammad Khān. The story itself appears often in Muslim Bengali folk-poetry because it plays an important part in the Muharram religious festivals.

¹⁷¹ ASITKUMĀR BANDYOPĀDHYĀY, BSI III, p. 719.

¹⁷² Samples of his poetry in English, see Poems from East Bengal, translated by YUSUF JAMAL BEGUM, Dacca 1954.

¹⁷³ Edited by MUHAMMAD ŠAHĪDULLĀH, Dacca 1949.

¹⁷⁴ Cf. BRAJASUNDAR SĀNYĀL, Musalmān baiṣṇab kabī, Calcutta 1904.

No less frequent are various fairy-tales, either of foreign or more probably domestic origin, which are retold in books written by Muslim Bengali poets of the 17th–19th centuries. Here again the rather narrow ties between these poets and the folk culture of their motherland became manifest. No wonder, then, that it was in the prevalingly Muslim areas of Bengal, in its eastern part, especially in the Mymensingh District, that remarkable secular folk-ballads called *gītikā* saw the light.

Thanks to Dineścandra Sen, a fairly large amount of these ballads have been preserved and even published.¹⁷⁵ The main merit, however, goes to Candrakumār De, a poor inhabitant of Eastern Mymensingh, who was not only the first to discover and mention them in the Mymensingh journal *Saurabh*, but also collected the majority of the published songs, after having been appointed to do so by the University of Calcutta. Obviously these ballads, or we had better say what was left of them, were retrieved at the very last moment of their existence. Nowadays they are no more to be heard, having perished and been replaced by other forms of folk entertainment.

Though there are songs from various parts of Bangladesh in Dineścandra Sen's edition, the overwhelming majority of the ballads have originated in the Eastern part of Mymensingh. They are secular in character, being mostly ballads of love, which is a tragic love in most cases, either based on social and caste inequality (a gipsy-girl and a zamindar, in *Mahuyā*, a washerwoman and a prince, in *Dhopār pāt*, a farmer's daughter and a Dewan, in *Dewānā Madinā*, etc.), or baffled by a greedy man of power (most frequently a high Muslim official, e.g. *Dewān Bhābnā*). One of the most peculiar traits of these ballads is the fact that they usually have female characters for their true heroes. A large variety of girls and women are depicted here who have to struggle for their love, to suffer because of it, or who have to die, not infrequently abandoned by everyone. They are doubtless among the noblest female characters found in pre-modern Bengali literature.

Some of these ballads are semi-historical in the sense that they either speak of personalities of established historicity (such as *Iśā Khān*, *Firoz Khān*, *Rājā Rāghunāth* etc.) or refer to places that exist till today (e.g. certain ponds). It is very probable that at least part of these songs were inspired by actual happenings, thus being a kind of poetically transformed accounts of facts which had attracted much attention when they occurred. They were given a poetic form by village poets and sung usually by professional or semi-professional singers (*gāyen*) to the accompaniment of a few musical instruments and a chorus. In the extant texts, the singers often directly address their audiences and add introductory songs (*bandanā*) and even insertions of their own. The

¹⁷⁵ *Maimansimha-gītikā (I)* and *Pūrbabaṅga-gītikā (II–IV)*. Calcutta 1923–32. See also DINESHCHANDRA SEN, *Eastern Bengal ballads*, Mymensing, Calcutta 1923; *Vieilles ballades du Bengale*, trad. de MADELEINE ROLLAND, d'après les textes bengalis et anglais édités par D. CH. SEN, Mouans-Sartoux n. d.

definite extinction of these groups, by the beginning of the present century, caused probably both by economic reasons and a shift of taste of the village audiences as well as the competition of printed booklets, was also the beginning of a rather rapid disappearance of the *gītikās*.

The ballads aroused considerable enthousiasm among many distinguished Western readers,¹⁷⁶ but no less suspicions among many Bengali scholars. Various doubts have been expressed, concerning not only the authenticity of the form in which the ballads have been preserved and published, and their language which is undoubtedly not an accurate replica of the Mymensingh dialect, but even the authenticity of the ballads as such.¹⁷⁷ None of the objections raised against the *gītikās* by their opponents is, however, strong enough to justify their complete exclusion from a history of Bengali literature.¹⁷⁸ Though they were recorded in a very amateurish way and there is a strong probability that some parts of the text were not preserved in exactly the same form as they had been sung by folk singers, they are certainly products of rural genius, and in their contents, verse form and similes representing a happy blending of traditional and folk poetics, they form an authentic and attractive branch of pre-modern Bengali literature.

A Western folklorist would probably hesitate to call them "pure folk-poetry," however. Many of the ballads bear the names of their authors in colophons (though these may be, and sometimes no doubt are, also names of later singers whose repertory they formed) and they were, in many cases at least, preserved by professionals, not circulating from mouth to mouth, as is the case with "usual" folk-poetry. Thus they may be considered a border-type between art literature and folk-poetry.

In the polemics concerning the authenticity of the ballads time was wasted by reverting again and again to their language. Objections were raised against non-dialectical words and grammatical forms as well as proper names (Mahuyā, Homrā etc.). In such a type of poetry, however, the language can hardly prove anything, not to speak of obvious interferences and "corrections" made both by the collectors and the editor. Neither can their language be made an argument when we are considering the age of these ballads. They were transmitted orally and must have undergone considerable changes, along with the gradual development of Bengali. It is, however, highly improbable that they might be regarded as antique as Dineścandra Sen thought them to be, speaking of the 15th and even the 14th century as the probable time of their origin. Both Asitkumār Bandyopādhyāy¹⁷⁹ and Tārāpad Bhaṭṭācārya¹⁸⁰ are probably

¹⁷⁶ E.g. Romain Rolland, Sir George Grierson, Sylvain Lévy etc.

¹⁷⁷ Cf. DUŠAN ZBAVITEL, Bengali Folk-Ballads from Mymensingh and the Problem of Their Authenticity. Calcutta 1963.

¹⁷⁸ Thus SUKUMAR SEN, in his HBL, and J. C. GHOSH, in his BL, do not mention these ballads at all.

¹⁷⁹ ASITKUMĀR BANDYOPĀDHYĀY, BSI III, pp. 1276-89.

¹⁸⁰ Baṅgasāhityer itihās: Prācīn parba. Calcutta 1962, pp. 363-4.

right in assigning them to a much later time. In a way they are a fruit of the same or a very similar mentality which, especially in the 17th and the 18th centuries, gave rise to the secular branch of Muslim Bengali literature, and continued to be composed even later, till deep into the 19th century. On the other hand, however, they are a testimony to the fact that religiously motivated or at least religiously garbed poetry did not entirely monopolize the attention of those who enjoyed pre-modern literature in Bengal.

BHĀRATCANDRA AND THE END OF AN EPOCH

When asked to name the greatest pre-modern Bengali poet, the majority of the Bengalis would certainly not omit the name of Bhāratcandra Rāy. For at least a hundred years, till the second half of the 19th century, he was spoken of as a model poet and his works, especially his elaboration of the Bidyā-Sundar story, were published in countless editions as soon as printing was introduced in Bengal. It was also Bhāratcandra who of all poets was the most frequently discussed by the first Bengali literary critics, about the middle of the 19th century. Many accused him of bad taste and obscenity, but nobody doubted his extraordinary poetic genius and mastery in verse technique.

Bhāratcandra Rāy¹⁸¹ was born in the village Pāṇḍuyā, not far from Calcutta, the youngest son of a rich zamindar. The date of his birth is not known, but may be safely put between 1705–12. The first part of the poet's life was very unhappy. His father lost all his property and his gifted son had to find his own way towards education. He succeeded, however, in mastering not only Sanskrit, but also Persian and Hindi to such a degree that he was able to write good poetry in all these languages. No wonder that, after a period of hardship and adventures, including a short stay in prison, his remarkable abilities attracted the attention of some influential people. He was appointed court poet of Kṛṣṇacandra, the Mahārāj of Nabadvīp, and spent the rest of his life, till his death in 1760, in relative comfort and prosperity.

The earliest writings of Bhāratcandra, two shorter poems on the mixed Hindu-Muslim deity Satya-Pīr, are not remarkable in any respect. His further work Rasamañjarī, of erotico-rhetorical character, revealed his intimate knowledge of the Sanskrit Kāmasūtra and various handbooks of poetics and was a very free adaptation of Bhāṇadatta's Sanskrit work, bearing the same title, of the 13th–14th century. Its contents, with their traditional detailed classification of the heroines (*nāyikās*) and their description, would hardly deserve mentioning. But apart from Bhāratcandra's deep knowledge of Sanskrit, it is an eloquent testimony to the poet's extraordinary skill in poetic technique, especially his ability to make the maximum use of the melodiousness of Bengali, with remarkable metaphors and a play upon words hard to match.

Bhāratcandra's chef-d'oeuvre was a large epic consisting of three parts, known under the title Annadāmaṅgal.¹⁸² It was composed on the instigation of the poet's patron Kṛṣṇacandra and finished in 1752. As indicated by the title, the poem is a glorification of the goddess Annadā (i.e. Pārvatī), whose family life with Śiva and deeds among other gods it depicts in the first part of the story. The main purpose of the book, however, was to glorify an ancestor of the Mahārāj Kṛṣṇacandra, Bhabānanda Majumdār, who is the main hero of the

¹⁸¹ MADANMOHAN GOSVĀMĪ, Rāygunākār Bhāratcandra. Calcutta s. d.

¹⁸² English translation, see *The Thief of Love*, ed. cit.

third part of the epic. The second, then, skilfully inserted in between, is a new elaboration of the Bidyā-Sundar story.

In its contents, the first part is a combination of purāṇic legends with folk myths as we have come to know this type from the Śībāyan and other books of similar character. The poet's attitude can hardly be called devotional or at least reverential. His Śiva and Annadā are well-drawn characters, but of human nature—amusing, living and full of temperament. Bhāratcandra never misses an opportunity of revealing their rustic character, both in their deeds and, especially, in their speech.

The second component of the book, the Bidyā-Sundar story, is the best as well as the most popular part of the trilogy. The goddess Annadā (Kālikā) plays her divine role in it, helping her protégé Sundar to win the princess and, at the end, to escape the punishment; but in spirit, it is a purely secular work, showing all the abilities of Bhāratcandra the narrator and the poet. In depicting erotic scenes he does not respect any limitations. It was for this reason that he has so often been accused of obscenity and immorality. As stressed by various scholars, however, Bhāratcandra only continued and developed the ancient tradition of Indian love poetry, in this respect, and it was rather Victorian morals which, later on, made his poetry appear obscene. After his *Rasamañjarī*, we are not surprised at his exploiting the poetic possibilities of every love situation in his characteristic way. On the other hand, even here the poet never loses a certain detachment from the story he is narrating. The story itself obviously does not carry him away; it is an instrument to play upon, with all his poetic skill and mastery, to improvise in order to show what Bengali is capable of, in the hands of a master poet.

The final part differs from the preceding two, first of all in not having a traditional subject. It is entitled *Mānsiṃha*, narrating the victorious march of the Mughal army under general *Mānsiṃha* who is being helped, in his war against the king *Pratāpāditya* of Jessore, by *Bhabānanda Majumdār*, a famous ancestor of *Mahārāj Kṛṣṇacandra*. This is the historical background of the story in which it is only thanks to *Bhabānanda's* help (assisted and protected by the goddess *Annadā*) that the Mughal army is able to win the day. At last *Pratāpāditya* is captured and brought by *Mānsiṃha* and *Bhabānanda* to the Emperor *Jahangir* at Delhi. The mighty Mughal ruler is not at all pleased to hear that he is obliged to an insignificant Bengali Hindu for his victory, and even less when he is asked by *Bhabānanda* to show devotion to a Hindu goddess. In a fit of anger, he puts *Bhabānanda* in prison, after which *Annadā* starts to terrorize the Muslim inhabitants of the capital so successfully that *Jahangir* is forced to release *Bhabānanda* and to establish the cult of *Durgā* in Delhi. Needless to say that none of these incidents has any historical truth behind it. It is a mixture of drops of history (a number of characters being historical personalities) and a flood of poetic imagination. *Bhāratcandra* ostentatiously celebrates *Kṛṣṇacandra's* ancestor at any price, willingly refraining from any pretension to keep close to the historical truth. His intentions do not need any veil or pretence.

Bhāratcandra was a robust poet and nothing else than a poet. He makes his readers know this in almost every line. He was a remarkable personality, witty, full of sarcasm and also of a good deal of contempt for his contemporaries, especially the higher society. Well aware of their weaknesses and hypocrisy, he stood high above them. This peculiar standpoint of Bhāratcandra was well characterized by J. C. Ghosh: "The author laughs at high society, but not in a corrective or reforming spirit, and has no morals to inculcate, no norms to uphold. He is moved by the spirit of pure fun, and his whole object is to amuse and entertain. He plays with everyone and everything, with gods and men and with love and sorrow, and he takes nothing seriously except his art."¹⁸³ Which, of course, is the attitude of a true professional.

The overwhelming majority of Bhāratcandra's predecessors were poets easily carried away by their emotions and devotion; well educated as some of them were, they let themselves be guided by their poetic instinct and inborn talent combined with the example of some great masters of the past and seldom (e.g. in the Vaishnava *padas*) by codified aesthetic rules. First of all, however, they expressed the emotions and the religious attitude of their listeners, more than once ignoring the subtle border-line between emotionality and sentimentalism. Bhāratcandra Rāy, however, was a poet of the classicist mind, bright and calculating. Ordered to celebrate the goddess Annadā, he did so without restraint, though hardly evincing much religious devotion to this particular goddess (why, during the preceding years, he even spent some time as a Vaishnava); asked to glorify an ancestor of his royal patron, he obliged the latter readily, consciously ignoring such trifles as historical truth and facts. He concentrated on his verse to display his mastery and erudition, to show *himself*. He was certainly not the first Bengali poet to do so, to give expression to his subjective ego. But his subjectivity was of a kind qualitatively different from, for instance, the rudiments of this quality met in Mukundarām or some *padakartās*. His was the standpoint of a poet who succeeded in standing above his time and its confusion and turmoil, above society with its basically helpless rulers and unsafe riches which might unexpectedly be turned into nothing. Had he not witnessed it in his own family? Had he not seen the fall of so many mighty persons? There was no certainty around him, no security. The centuries old Hindu society proved unable to check not only the advance of the Muslims, but also the invasion of British merchants and stood helpless at the very verge of what must have appeared, to an intelligent man with broad horizons, a total destruction. It was only an able individual who had a chance to survive and to make himself famous and prosperous, provided he was not lacking the necessary intellect and, of course, prudence. Bhāratcandra never openly criticized the high society which was giving him his daily bread, he never propounded any ideas of revolt against it. It would be an anachronism to expect this from him, a man of the Middle Ages. But in his poetry, he stood distinctly apart from this society.

¹⁸³ J. C. GHOSH, BL, p. 91.

"The aristocratic-feudal civilization of India came to an end in the eighteenth century, and the inner corruption of the aristocracy of the age has left many marks in Bhāratcandra's work," says J. C. Ghosh.¹⁸⁴ Not only its corruption, we may add, also its essential helplessness, in spite of all the riches it had accumulated and all the power it wielded.

Bhāratcandra's subjectivity found yet another remarkable outlet in his works. There are several songs, in his *Annadāmaṅgal*, which may be justly called predecessors of modern poetry. As stated by Asitkumār Bandyopādhyāy: "In the poems which Bhāratcandra embodied into his *Bidyā-Sundar*, there appeared poetic signs of the modern age. The form and contents of subjective songs are a modern matter . . . Unconsciously Bhāratcandra paved the way for the poetry of the 19th century."¹⁸⁵

And not only by these lyrical insertions. Eleven independent poems composed by Bhāratcandra have been preserved which may be considered precursors of modern lyrics. Except a few with traditional subjects, they treat of such phenomena as springtime, the rains, the wind, desire. Let us quote, as an instance, his poem on the Spring:

Good was the winter, that heat of the fire of desire
hurting the heart has now become unbearable.
There was no voice of the kokil, the humble-bee was silent,
the northern wind calm and the trees living.
Now the snaky wind has enchanted the world,
only the call of Desire takes the Ruler along.
You have given a body to the Bodiless, you let the dried wood bloom,
you have charmed Bhārat(candra), O Spring!¹⁸⁶

Though inspired by similar poems in Sanskrit or even in Persian (the recurrent use of the same rhyme at the end of each couplet, very similar to that of the Persian *ghazal*, seems to point rather to the latter), these poems are the first independent verses on secular themes in Bengali literature and a testimony to Bhāratcandra's "modern" attitude.

It was his masterly skill in poetic technique and his poetic diction which were appreciated most by his contemporaries and his 19th-century readers and critics. But this formal aspect must not obscure his other qualities that are worth attention and appreciation. In his article on folk-literature, Rabīndranāth Thākur said: "Why is there such an admiration for (Bhāratcandra's) *Bidyā-Sundar*? Because it is a very clever ridicule of the oppressive and hard society by a human mind."¹⁸⁷ This is something that nobody before him was able to achieve.

By no means, however, may Bhāratcandra's attitude and poetry be considered typical of his time. Just the opposite; the overwhelming majority of his

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 94.

¹⁸⁵ ASITKUMĀR BANDYOPĀDHYĀY, BSI III, p. 1007.

¹⁸⁶ Bhāratcandra-granthāvalī, ed. by BRAJENDRANĀTH BANDYOPĀDHYĀY and SAJANIKĀNTA DĀS. Calcutta, 2nd ed., 1951, pp. 445-6.

¹⁸⁷ Rabīndra racanāvalī, Vol. 6, Calcutta 1961, p. 647.

contemporaries and immediate successors were poets with a rather strong religious bias, reacting to the deterioration of the conditions in Bengal, especially in the second half of the 18th century, by devotional religious poetry. Prominent among them were the Śākta poets, propounding the cult of Śakti, the Divine Mother, and most often taking refuge with her feet like helpless children, or reviving old Tāntrik cults.

The number of the authors of Śākta stanzas,¹⁸⁸ in the second half of the 18th century and at the beginning of the 19th, was very high and their songs became extremely popular with the broad masses of the people, but the literary value of this poetry is meagre. With endless repetitions it makes allusions to the goddess Umā (i.e. Pārvatī), the divine consort of Śiva, begging her to help and glorifying her without much originality or poetic invention. However great the religionistic importance and interest of this trend may be, it certainly does not deserve much attention on the part of the historian of Bengali literature. Rather exceptional were such poets as Rāmprasād Sen¹⁸⁹ or Kamalākānta Bhaṭṭācārya¹⁹⁰ whose songs, besides offering consolation to their countrymen, also revealed poetic skill and inner sincerity.

Rāmprasād Sen (ca. 1720–1781), though far from being the first Śākta poet in Bengali literature, may be considered the main originator of the new Śākta movement. As his songs show, he was well aware of the miserable conditions of his time, but offered a way out of it—towards the Divine Mother whom he invoked with utmost sincerity and devotion. His poetry is charged with emotion, his diction simple and effective. There is hardly any other Śākta poet to match his popularity.

He was not only the author of these devotional stanzas, but wrote also epics, of which only the Bidyā-Sundar and the Kālikīrtan have been preserved in full. The latter relates the story of the childhood and the youth of the goddess Umā until her wedding with Śiva. Obvious is the influence of the Krishna-story and its elaborations, both in contents and form. Rāmprasād Sen was undoubtedly much more successful in his songs than in his epics. Nor is his version of the Bidyā-Sundar story much better, differing unfavourably from that by Bhāratcandra.

Rāmprasād Sen lived long enough to witness what may be characterized as the period of the worst decay Bengal has ever experienced. After the battle of Plassey, the East India Company practically took over the rule of the country, though nominally the Nawabs of Murshidabad continued to sit on the throne. The country suffered beyond description. The famine of 1770, during which

¹⁸⁸ Bengali Religious Lyrics—Śākta, translated by E. J. THOMPSON and A. M. SPENCER, Calcutta 1923. Cf. also ŚAŚIBHŪṢAṆ DĀSGUPTA, *Bhārater sakti-sādhana o śākta sāhitya*, Calcutta 1960.

¹⁸⁹ DĪNEŚCANDRA BHATṬĀCĀRYA, *Kabirañjan Rāmprasād Sen*, Calcutta; ŚIBA-PRASĀD BHATṬĀCĀRYA, *Bhāratcandra o Rāmprasād*, Calcutta.

¹⁹⁰ ŚRĪRĪKĀLĪSARANAM ŚYĀMĀSAṆGIT, Calcutta 1857; cf. also, ATULCANDRA MUKHOPĀDHYĀY, *Sādhak Kamalākānta*, Calcutta.

almost one third of the entire population of Bengal is reported to have died, was an inevitable result of the catastrophic development of Bengal's economic and political chaos. In 1772 Hastings started concentrating all offices in Calcutta; two years later, the Supreme Court was established there and the city grew with speed which nobody would have predicted a short time ago. Between 1750 and 1814, Calcutta's population increased from 20,000 to about 700,000 which indicates how many people from villages crowded the city in order to find a new living here. Everything had to change, along with the progress of time. The establishment of this new urban centre brought about, in its consequences, the irrevocable end of the old social structure of the country and, inevitably, also its rural culture. Foundations of a new literature had to be laid, qualitatively different from the traditional poetry and better adapted to the needs and requirements of the day.

It does not mean, however, that the mortal blow dealt to the village society and its traditional culture resulted in an immediate death of the latter. For the whole century to follow, the village society tried to go on living as before, clinging to its ancient traditions; repeated efforts not only to maintain, but even to revive traditional branches of literature may be witnessed. Needless to say, however, that these efforts could not win, in the long run, and had to recede, reluctantly and slowly, before the impact of a new trend of events.

In the literature that immediately preceded the definite victory of modernistic trends, an important place, almost a monopoly, was occupied by different songs continuing, in various ways, the centuries-long tradition of poetry to be sung. All critics and historians of Bengali literature agree in the view that the general level of these songs was extremely low and that, in comparison with the preceding "classical" poetry, they were a definite step back.¹⁹¹ When characterizing the most outstanding poets of this musico-literary type of poetry, S. K. De says: "During the continuance of the dual government, between 1765 and 1775, and in the period of literary interregnum which followed upon the death of Bhārat-chandra, they were the most considerable pretenders in the literary field; and if the mantle of the old authors did not exactly suit their narrow shoulders, they attempted in the main to echo the sentiment and ideas of old-world poetry."¹⁹²

During the one-hundred-year period of this 'interregnum', a number of various types of songs developed, both in the Bengali countryside and the new-born capital of Calcutta, following one another in a rather quick succession and also mutually influencing each other. First of them were the *kabigān*, songs of the so-called *kabiwālās* (lit. versifiers). Their most typical characteristic was

¹⁹¹ They are being paid enough attention in literary research; cf. ASIT BANDYOPADHYĀY, BSI IV; S. K. DE, BLNC; NIRANJAN CAKRABARTĪ, *Ūnabimśa śatābdīr kabiwālā o Bāmlā sāhitya*. Calcutta 1958; *Prācīn kabiwālār gān*, ed. by PRAPHULLACANDRA PĀL, Calcutta 1958; *Īśvarcandra Gupta, Kabijibānī*, ed. by BHABATOṢ DATTA, Calcutta 1958, etc.

¹⁹² S. K. DE, BLNC, p. 273.

the way of their public performance—a sort of poetic combat between two rival groups of singers accompanied by small orchestras. The oldest available descriptions of such contests, from the first half of the 19th century, agree in stating that the performances had certain fixed rules, according to which the singers had to exhaust different topics, in the “questions” and “answers” they sang. Though these subjects vary in different descriptions, indicating that there was either a development of the *kabigān* in this respect, or that various types existed side by side, the most important components of the contest were obviously songs dealing with the love of Krishna and Rādhā (*sakhī-saṃbād*) and the maternal love of Menakā towards Umā (often called *saptamī*), both belonging to traditional subjects. In the course of time, however, a significant novelty appeared—songs dealing with secular subjects: *biraha*, singing of the separation of lovers (not of Rādhā and Krishna any more, but profane), and the so-called *kheur*, i.e. wanton erotic songs, always referred to as “obscene,” “indecent” and “immoral” (as such they were completely excluded from all editions so that not a single sample is nowadays available for judgement). The latter were obviously one of the main attractions of *kabiwālā* contests, especially after they had conquered Calcutta, in the beginning of the 19th century.

The time between the end of the 18th century and the 1830s was the heyday of this particular type of poetry, the most outstanding representatives of which were Haru Thākur (1738–1824¹⁹³) and Rām Basu (1786–1828). The number of *kabiwālās*, at that time, was very high and the majority of them were professional singers. Among the others, an undoubtedly interesting figure was Āṇṭani (i.e. Anthony) Firingī (d. 1836), a Portuguese by birth, but so utterly Bengalized that he was able to compete in the *kabigān* with the most renowned masters of the period.

Very similar to the *kabigān* were the *ākhrāi* and the *hāph* (i.e. half) *ākhrāi*.¹⁹⁴ Their origin goes back to the beginning of the 18th century but their development culminated at the beginning of the 19th century in Calcutta. “The *kabigān*, the *ākhrāi* and the *hāph ākhrāi* are fruits of the same tree, but there are differences in their respective tastes and shapes,” says Asitkumār Bandyopādhyāy.¹⁹⁵ The latter two were far more refined, and more stress was laid on the musical component which was obviously the decisive factor in judging which of the contesting groups had won the victory. In contents, they did not differ considerably from the *kabigān*, treating the maternal love to Umā, the separation of lovers and the erotic subjects as well. The *ākhrāi* owes most to Kulucandra Sen, from the end of the 18th century, and Nidhubābu; their even more refined branch, the *hāph ākhrāi*, was introduced by Nidhubābu’s disciple, Mohanānd Basu, in 1832, but the value of its contribution to Bengal art lies only in the music, not in textual peculiarities.

¹⁹³ But S. K. DE, BLNC, p. 322, gives 1812 as the year of his death.

¹⁹⁴ GAṄGĀCARAṆ BEDĀNTA BIDYĀSĀGAR, *Hāph ākhrāi saṅgīt-saṃgrāmer itihās*, Calcutta 1905.

¹⁹⁵ ASITKUMĀR BANDYOPĀDHYĀY, BSI IV, p. 230.

Nidhubābu, mentioned above, is one of the greatest personalities of this period and the best-known representative of this particular type of songs. It was he who introduced into Bengali the songs called *ṭappā*, adapting them from Hindi sources. *Ṭappā*, characterized by S. K. De as “a little song of a light nature,”¹⁹⁶ though inseparable from and practically unthinkable without its musical component, has undoubtedly more literary significance than any other type of songs treated so far. First of all, it is completely free from any religious implications, singing of profane love, mostly as if uttered by a woman separated from her lover. In this respect, it forms a kind of bridge between the old and modern phases of Bengali culture. “The sense of the difficulty and complexity of modern problems is, no doubt, absent in them,” says S. K. De, “nor do they possess the finish and refinement of modern lyrics, yet the *Ṭappā*-writers foreshadow in their own way that introspective element which has since developed itself in such great measure—some think out of all measure—in modern poetry.”¹⁹⁷

As stated already, the best *ṭappās* were composed by the father of this musico-poetic form, Rāmnidhi Gupta, usually called Nidhubābu (1741–1839). He was a selfmade-man who succeeded in acquiring a certain knowledge of English, besides learning Hindi and Persian, and worked for a couple of years as a revenue collector of the East India Company outside Calcutta. In 1794 he gave up his job and settled in Calcutta to start his brilliant artistic career, to teach music and especially to perform his *ṭappās* which instantaneously won high recognition and popularity. The majority of his songs, many of which he edited himself in the book *Gītaratna*¹⁹⁸ (The Jewels of Songs), are simple love songs and are said to have been inspired by Nidhubābu's love for a singer. Some modern critics appreciate these *ṭappās* very high, but Asitkumār Bandyopādhyāy is more reserved in his estimate: “In fact Nidhubābu was an excellent composer and skilful musician, poetry being but a by-product of his musical talent.”¹⁹⁹ In any case, however, he had no rival in general popularity in his time and even nowadays when one reads his simple songs, one may well imagine how effective they must have been emotionally, in combination with Nidhubābu's famous melodies:

How shall I explain, of friend, how much I love him ?
 All my limbs tremble at the sight of him.
 When I don't see him, my eyes weep,
 And when I see him, I think: Where should I keep my treasure ?²⁰⁰

Another proof of the supremacy of the *ṭappā* over the *kabigān* and the *ākṣṛāi* is the fact that the former could retain its popularity for a much longer

¹⁹⁶ S. K. DE, BLNC, p. 351.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 353.

¹⁹⁸ Newly edited by RAMĀKĀNTA CAKRABARTĪ, under the title *Bismṛta darśan*, Calcutta 1971.

¹⁹⁹ ASITKUMĀR BANDYOPĀDHYĀY, BSI IV, p. 296.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 292.

time. Other poets and composers followed the example of Nidhubābu, among whom especially Kālī Mirzā (i.e. Kālidās Caṭṭopādhyāy, about 1750–1820) and Śrīdhar Kathak (b. 1816)²⁰¹ won general favour.

That the transition from the old and the traditional to the new and the modern was far from being an easy and smooth process, can be concluded from the fact that, at least till the middle of the 19th century, there appeared ever new attempts at promoting such literary genres and forms that were direct continuations of some traditional elements of Bengali literature, not infrequently with religious themes. In the traditional *yātrā* which passed through a period of renaissance in Calcutta, during the first half of the 19th century, old themes—the Krishna-Rādhā story, episodes from the Rāmāyaṇa and the Mahābhārata, the Bidyā-Sundar story, etc.—were at least supplemented by new subjects of secular, mostly semi-historical character (Rājā Bikramāditya, Kalirājār yātrā etc.), but in the poetic *pāṃcālī* the traditional mentality clearly prevailed over modernistic trends and was, in a way, even directed against the latter.

The *pāṃcālī* or *pāṃcālīgān* was a mixed musical, dance and especially poetic performance, following the example of the *kabīgān* and the *ākhrāi* in that it also came to have the form of a competition between rival parties. Here, however, the method of putting questions and answering them was not used; the competition was narrowed to the brilliance of the performance. It consisted of three parts—recital, singing and extemporaneous composition of short poetic pieces (*charā*). Needless to say that an orchestra was always necessary and even dancing was sometimes introduced.

The subjects of a *pāṃcālī* performance included the Rādhā-Krishna story, the Rāmāyaṇa, the divine play of Śiva and Pārvatī and various *maṅgalkāvyā* stories. This at least seems to be indicated by the *pāṃcālīs* composed by the founder and the greatest representative of the genre, Dāśarathi or Dāśu Rāy (1806–1857).²⁰²

He was a man of very little education, but he obviously knew, at least partly, Sanskrit and some English which he learned while working for the East India Company. Though a Brahmin, he married a singer in whose *kabivālā* group he started his artistic career. In 1837, however, he established a group of his own, boldly introducing the new genre of the *pāṃcālī*, and soon won both fame and wealth. Considering the fact that in the contents of his songs traditional elements prevailed, it is not surprising to hear of the great success which Dāśarathi enjoyed among the conservative sections of society and even among the paṇḍits of Nabadvīp. Though he stayed mostly in Calcutta and performed there, in his heart and art he remained a rustic poet and his songs appealed to the non-modern, traditional scholars and masses.

On the other hand, he did not exclusively confine his poetry to traditional and religious subjects, and there is little doubt that his broader audiences in

²⁰¹ The date of his death is not mentioned in any of our sources.

²⁰² Dāśarathi Rāyer *pāṃcālī*, ed. by HARIPAD CAKRAVARTI, Calcutta 1960; ARUNADAY RĀY, Dāśarathi Rāyer *pāṃcālī*, Calcutta 1898.

Calcutta were first of all attracted by his humorous and satiric *pāṃcālīs*, in which he wittily ridiculed the modernists (opposing, for instance, the Widow Remarriage Act), but also narrow-minded sectarians. Among his most acclaimed works were allegorical erotic poems, with parts so obscene that they have never been printed. It must be stressed, however, that Dāśarathi Rāy was an exceptionally gifted versifier and a unique poet in that he was a born satirist and humorist, which is a quality not often to be met in the 19th-century Bengali poetry.

Dāśarathi Rāy had a number of followers who continued to keep the *pāṃcālī* in the focus of public favour for a couple of decades. Among them, at least Rāsikcandra Rāy²⁰³ and Brajamohan Rāy must be mentioned, the latter using the form of the *pāṃcālī* for commenting, in verse, upon contemporary events. Manomohan Basu, with whom the development of the *pāṃcālī* came to its end, belonged entirely to the modern age.

²⁰³ Rāsikcandra Rāy, *Pāṃcālī*, pratham bhāg, Calcutta 1890.

THE BIRTH OF MODERN LITERATURE

During all those decades in which *kabīwālās* and singers of the *ākhrāi* and the *pāṃcālī* songs were entertaining the masses of the quickly expanding Calcutta, something far more important was going on in Bengal. Something new was coming into existence here, with far-reaching consequences which nobody was able to forebode yet. Nothing less than foundation stones not only of the modern Bengali literature, but of Modern India were being laid, through the painstaking process of modernizing the very substance of the way of life and thinking, to result in a new, modern mentality.

Its birthplace was, of course, Calcutta and the time of its birth the first half of the 19th century.²⁰⁴ However barren this period may appear to a mere literary analysis, it was a fascinating period of an unprecedented confrontation of the traditional with the new, of the domestic with the foreign. Almost without opposition, the British were taking over the rule and the economic exploitation of farther and farther parts of India from the incapable hands of the decayed Mughals and petty Rajas, raising hundreds of questions in the minds of the most intelligent Bengalis of the time: Where does this apparent superiority stem from? What are the roots of this bewildering power? How to cope with it? The questions had to be answered not in the quiet separation of an ascetic's *āśram* but in the turmoil of the confrontation place itself, in the daily heat of the battle.

Arms and armory were needed, however, and it was the British themselves who started supplying them—in their own interest, of course. In order to be able to dominate the country in an even more intensive way, they founded the Fort William College in Calcutta in 1800, “. . . for the better instruction of the Junior Civil Servants of the Company,”²⁰⁵ and started preparing textbooks, grammars and dictionaries of Bengali (Halhed, Carey, etc.). In order to tie the “natives” to England with more permanent and tighter bonds, they propagated Christianity, translating the New (1801) and the Old Testament (1802–9) into Bengali and even established a Bengali press in Śrīrāmpur (Serampore Baptist Mission Press). In order to fight against Hindu “idolatry” and “superstitions,” they founded the first monthly in Bengali, *Digdarśan* (1818).

The basic and the most important question of the day, for the Bengalis, was: How to react to these facts? Should they ignore them, patiently relying on their millennial traditions and their inner strength and believing that, eventually, they would by themselves defeat the intruder? Or should they adapt themselves to the new circumstances and try to make the maximum use of what may be learned from the British, both in their technics and philosophy, their civilization

²⁰⁴ SUSHIL KUMAR DE, Bengali literature in the nineteenth century, Calcutta 1919 (1962).

²⁰⁵ Minutes in Council at the Fort William by His Excellency the Most Hon'ble Marquis of Wellesley, containing his reasons for the establishment of a College in Bengal, dated August 18, 1800. Quoted in S. K. DE, BLNC, p. 110.

and culture? Or perhaps even discard the heritage of the past altogether and take over whatever Europe was offering in all spheres of life?

Throughout the first half of the 19th century, all these widely differing attitudes might be observed among the Bengalis of Calcutta, or, to be more exact, the newly arising bourgeoisie of Calcutta, the middle class which was the only force able to solve these problems.²⁰⁶ For long decades to come, the majority of Bengalis outside Calcutta and the poor of the city remained practically unaffected by this fierce struggle, but among the Calcutta new-born intelligentsia the differentiation became soon rather obvious.

The left wing of the front was occupied by radicals who flourished especially around the thirties. They believed that "the light of the West was all that was needed to set one on the way to progress,"²⁰⁷ often renounced Hinduism altogether and embraced Christianity and, at the same time, did not consider the Bengali language capable of conveying what in their view were ideas of progress. The latter issue seems to have been of longer duration; even such great masters of Bengali literature in the 19th century as the poet Madhusūdan Datta (himself a Christian convert) and the novelist Baṅkimcandra Caṭṭopādhyāy started writing in English, before turning towards their mother tongue. Under the strong influence of the 'Anglo-Indian' H. L. Vivian Derozio²⁰⁸ of Portuguese-Indian ancestry (1808–1831) and his followers of the Young Bengal group, the radicals were rather influential, at a time, but obviously could not win in the long run.

The opposite extreme was represented especially by the Muslim bourgeoisie of Calcutta which, in their majority, ignored the modernizing efforts, obviously clinging to their old Islamic ideals. Only seldom do we find a Muslim name among the hundreds of those who, in this or that way, contributed to the process of modernization and the birth and initial growth of the modern Bengali literature. The basically negative attitude of the Muslims towards modern education resulted finally in that they considerably lagged behind the modern Hindu intelligentsia and, though numerically constituting the majority of the population, played but an almost negligible role in the 19th-century cultural development of the Bengal country.²⁰⁹

On the Hindu side, the right wing was represented by the orthodox group, with personalities such as the educationist Rādhākānta Deb (1784–1867),²¹⁰ the journalist and writer Bhabāṇicaran Bandyopādhyāy and the poet Īśvarcandra Gupta in the lead. Though notoriously known and labelled as opponents to those whose standpoints the run of history proved to be the most correct and

²⁰⁶ BINAY GHOSH, *Bidyāsāgar o Bāmlā samāj*, I, Calcutta 1957, pp. 105–7.

²⁰⁷ S. K. DE, BLNC, p. 110.

²⁰⁸ BINAY GHOSH, *Bidrohī Dīrojo*, Calcutta 1961.

²⁰⁹ Cf. A. F. SALAHUDDIN AHMED, *Social Ideas and Social Change in Bengal, 1818–1835*, Leiden 1965; M. S. QURESHI, *Étude sur l'évolution intellectuelle chez les Musulmans du Bengale, 1857–1947*, Paris 1971.

²¹⁰ YOGEŚCANDRA BĀGAL, *Rādhākānta Deb*, Calcutta 1957.

fruitful (especially Rāmmohan Rāy and his followers), the „rightists“ were definitely not opposed to all progressive ideas of modern education, to looking for new roads in literature, or to taking over scientific knowledge from the British. The main and basically, the only serious, issue of controversy both with Christian missionaries and the reformists, was Hinduism and its individual institutions which they believed must be defended at any price.

Seen from this point of view, those who were the main bearers of enlightenment and the main propounders of progress appear to occupy the “centre.” In respect of religion, which was the main issue during that period, they never thought of discarding Hinduism, but strongly believed in the necessity of its reform, in both its religious aspects (idolatry, polytheism, etc.) and social institutions and customs (caste, family, marriage, etc.). They were ready and even eager to learn English, but were well aware, at the same time, of the necessity to pay much attention to Bengali and its development into a modern language capable of expressing all ideas and communicating every knowledge. Tradition, both spiritual and literary, was, in their view, a vast repertory of priceless gems to be preserved as well as useless rubbish to be thrown away. To combine and synthesize what appeared to be the best achievements of both India in the past and Europe in modern times—this was their leading slogan and their working motto.

As far as the further literary development in Bengali is concerned, it was of primary importance that the British not only founded the Fort William College and appointed Bengali paṇḍits as instructors, but also encouraged them to write textbooks for use at the College. Thus the *Pratāpādityacaritra* (The Life of Pratāpāditya) was written and published, in 1801, on the initiative of William Carey (1761–1834), first a Baptist missionary and then a teacher of Bengali and Sanskrit at the Fort William College, who himself contributed to the study and development of modern literary Bengali by a number of books.²¹¹ The *Pratāpādityacaritra* was composed by Rāmram Basu²¹² and may claim to be not only the first Bengali book written entirely in prose but also the first historical treatise created by a Bengali. Considering its pioneer character, it is surprisingly reliable as a historical account, being based on Persian chronicles. Of even more importance is its good prose style, capable of serving as a model to other writers and a happy starting-point of the development of Bengali literary prose.²¹³

²¹¹ A Grammar of the Bengali Language, 1801; Kathopakathan, or Colloquies or Dialogues intended to facilitate the acquiring of the Bengalee Language, 1801; *Itihāsmālā*, a collection of stories, 1812; A Dictionary of the Bengalee Language, 1815–25.

²¹² BRAJENDRANĀTH BANDYOPĀDHYĀY, Rām Rām Basu, Calcutta 1928.

²¹³ See SISIRKUMAR DAS, Early Bengali Prose. Carey to Vidyāsāgar, Calcutta 1966; SUKUMĀR SEN, *Bāṅgālā sāhitye gadya*, 4th ed., Calcutta 1966; ŚYĀMAL-KUMĀR CAṬṬOPĀDHYĀY, *Bāṅlā gadyer kramabikāś*, Calcutta 1959; MANOMOHAN GHOSH, *Bāṅlā gadyer cār yug*, Calcutta 1949.

A number of other textbooks followed, during the next fifteen years, including further historical tracts, such as *Mahārāj Kṛṣṇacandra Rāyasya caritram* (The Life of the Maharaja Kṛṣṇacandra Rāy) by Rājiblocan Mukhopādhyāy (1805), and *Rājābali* (The Kings) by Mrtyuñjay Bidyālaṅkāṛ (1808), or purely didactic and instructional books, i.e. *Lipimālā* (Letters) by Rāmram Basu (1802) and *Prabodhcandrikā* (Moonlight of Intelligence, 1813) by Mrtyuñjay Bidyālaṅkāṛ which treated various subjects. Even more numerous were translations, or rather adaptations of such works as the *Sanskrit Hitopadeśa* (Bengali version by Golaknāth Śarmā, 1802, and yet another by Mrtyuñjay Bidyālaṅkāṛ, 1808) or *Simhāsanaadvātriṃśikā* (in Bengali, *Batris simhāsan*, by Mrtyuñjay again, 1802), and of the Persian *Tūtīnāme* (in Bengali, *Totā itihās*, The Parrot's Tales, by Caṇḍicaraṇ Munṣī, 1805).

As the list shows, all of these translations were based on Eastern originals, the complete lack of any European book indicating the then "orientalist" educational policy of the British authorities. After all, these books were not meant for the Bengali public but for English pupils; but even as far as schools for the Bengalis were concerned, which inevitably had to follow soon, the same tendency prevailed—to stress exclusively domestic traditions as the only basis of native schools. This, however, was not what the enlightened Bengalis of the period wanted and demanded. And thus the initiative in a further intensification of the impetus towards modernization had to be taken by the Bengalis themselves in order to give the movement the desired direction and speed.

This movement, often known under the name of Bengali Renaissance,²¹⁴ was very wide in range, trying to influence, and as far as the Calcutta middle class was concerned also indeed influencing, the whole spiritual, social and cultural life of the inhabitants of the Bengali capital. It is impossible to describe it in detail here, following the dramatic unfolding of the ideological struggle step by step, in all sections and aspects of life and thinking.²¹⁵ We cannot, however, confine our summary to merely literary reflections and the literary results of this struggle. Till almost the end of the fifties, in spite of the large number of books and journals which appeared in Bengali, very little was written and published which may be described as literature in the proper sense of the term. Neither would it be right to apply purely literary criteria to this mass of printed words. Practically without a single exception, its aim was not any art literature but education and enlightenment. Everything was permeated

²¹⁴ This term, however, does not seem particularly happy; cf. ASITKUMĀR BANDYOPĀDHYĀY, USP, p. 194.

²¹⁵ It has been treated in a number of books, e.g. ASITKUMĀR BANDYOPĀDHYĀY, USP; S. K. DE, BLNC; AMIT SEN, Notes on Bengali Renaissance, Bombay 1946; Studies in the Bengali Renaissance, ed. by ATUL CHANDRA GUPTA, Calcutta 1958; NEMAI SANDHAN BOSE, The Indian Awakening and Bengal, Calcutta 1960 R. C. MAJUMDAR, Glimpses of Bengal in the Nineteenth Century, Calcutta 1960; ŚAŚIBHŪṢAṆ DĀSGUPTA, Bāmlā sāhitye nabayug, Calcutta 1952; MOHITLĀL MAJUMDĀR, Bāmlār nabayug, Calcutta 1946; ŚUŚILKUMĀR GUPTA, Ūnabīṃṣa śatābdtīe Bāṅgālār nabajāgaraṇ, Calcutta 1959, etc.

by a didactic tendency, by efforts to contribute towards creating a new, modern type of life, towards clarifying standpoints, solving problems and giving answers to the most pertinent questions of the time. No wonder, then, that so much attention was absorbed by creating the prerequisites of this movement, i.e. modern schools, journals and periodicals, and various societies and associations.

In all these respects, the modernizing movement²¹⁶ is inseparably connected, from its very beginning, with the name of the greatest personality of the period, Rāmmohan Rāy.²¹⁷ He was born in 1774 in Rādhānagar, Hooghly District, in a rich Brahmin's family and though his father eventually lost all his landed property, Rāmmohan himself was well-off, during all his life, and was able to pursue his studies, taking up a job but occasionally, either with the East India Company or the Mughals. He knew Sanskrit, Persian and Arabic and learned English, too, thus being able to gather first-hand knowledge of the main religious systems he was mostly interested in, Hinduism, Islam and Christianity. Since 1814 he settled down in Calcutta where he soon became the pivot of all spiritual, social and cultural life. Rāmmohan stayed in Calcutta till 1830 when he left for England, appointed a special envoy of the Mughal Akbar II to the King of England and granted also the title of Rājā for this occasion. He never came back, dying at Bristol in 1833.

Rāmmohan Rāy was an exceptional personality not only because of his unusually wide erudition and profound knowledge, but especially of his open mind, broad outlook, rationalistic approach towards various problems and ability to select the most pertinent elements in whatever he was concerned with. And, as a matter of fact, he was concerned with practically everything which was of any significance for the all-round modernization of Bengali life and thought. At the very beginning of his Calcutta career, he translated and interpreted selected parts of ancient Indian philosophy, especially books on the Vedānta and some Upanishads. His aim was to direct the attention of his contemporaries to the original sources of Hinduism, in order to find what had formed the very basis of the Hindu *Weltanschauung*. Rāmmohan understood that in the Indian milieu and with Indian traditions, it was necessary to concentrate first on religious problems and their issues and to modernize Hinduism as the most relevant basis of life and ideology.

It was with this aim in view that he founded the Ātmiya Sabhā, in 1815, the Unitarian Committee, in 1821, and the Brāhma Sabhā, in 1828, later turned into the well-known Brāhma Samāj. They were not only associations aiming at discussions on and propagation of ideas of reform, but also important organizational platforms to combine efforts of all progressive Bengalis of the time.

²¹⁶ BENOY GOPAL RAY, Religious movements in modern Bengal, Santiniketan 1965.

²¹⁷ S. D. COLLET, The Life and Letters of Raja Rammohun Roy, London 1896; Selections from Official Letters and Documents Relating to the Life of Raja Rammohan Roy, ed. by J. K. MAJUMDAR, Calcutta 1958; The English Works of Raja Rammohan Roy, Allahabad 1906.

They were engaged in polemics both with Christian missionaries, to defend Hinduism, and with the orthodox group (whose similar platform was, since 1830, the Dharma Sabhā), trying to persuade them that in order to give Hinduism a new place in life, it was imperative to get rid of its idolatry,²¹⁸ polytheism as well as caste prejudice and certain inhuman customs like *satī* (burning widows alive). It was in the latter issue that Rāmmohan's group scored the first victory; in 1829, after a series of tracts written by Rāmmohan against *satī* and a considerable movement to abolish this practice it was forbidden by a special act.

The year 1817 was characterized by much activity concerning modern education. In opposition to the official British 'orientalist' educational policy mentioned already, the Bengali modernists led by Rāmmohan Rāy and strongly supported by the enlightened Englishman David Hare founded the Hindu College in Calcutta, "the opening of which marks an important stage in our history as the first systematic effort made by the Indians themselves for English education in Bengal."²¹⁹ Of no less importance was the foundation of the Calcutta School Books Society, in the same year, and the Calcutta School Society, in 1818, to further modern primary schools in which Bengali was the teaching language, and to provide them with suitable textbooks. By 1821, the Calcutta School Society was already supervising 115 schools with a total of 3,828 pupils.²²⁰

These new schools, on one hand, made English accessible to the young Bengali generation, and on the other, acquainted them systematically with modern achievements in the sciences, history, geography, etc. and to a large extent also with European literature. For these schools, moreover, modern textbooks were written, the importance of which often surpassed that of mere school manuals. It was here that modern Bengali terminology was coined and whole branches of Western knowledge summed up. Among the pioneer publications of this kind, Rādhākānta Deb's *Bāṅglā śikṣāgrantha* (Bengali Textbook, 1821) must be mentioned. Though not written for the same purpose, the main contribution to the further development of Bengali and its study was Rāmmohan Rāy's Bengali grammar, published first in English (Bengalee Grammar in the English Language, 1826) and later in Bengali (*Gauṛīya byākaraṇ*, 1833).

The year 1818, again, was distinguished by the appearance of the first periodicals in Bengali: the monthly *Digdarśan arthāt yubaloker kāraṇ saṃgrhīta nānā upadeś* (The Compass or Various Advice Collected for Young People) and the weekly *Samācār darpaṇ* (The Mirror of the News), both published by the Serampore missionaries, and yet another weekly, *Bāṅgāl gejeṭ* (Bengali Gazette) edited by Gaṅgākīśor Bhaṭṭācārya. Whereas the *Digdarśan* was heartily welcomed by the Bengali public, because it contained many interesting articles that considerably enlarged the limited scope of

²¹⁸ Cf. Rāmmohan Rāy, *Dialogue between a Theist and an Idolator*, ed. by STEPHEN HAY, Calcutta 1964.

²¹⁹ S. K. DE, BLNC, p. 464.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 468.

knowledge of the youth of Bengal about the Western world (i.e. the discovery of America, Sadler's journey in a balloon, the use of steam in ships, etc.), the *Samācār darpaṇ* followed the same informative policy only for some time and then started attacking Hinduism and its customs, with the obvious intention to prove the supremacy of Christianity. Inevitably a retort had to come. Rāmmohan Rāy started publishing the English-Bengali weekly *Brahmunical Magazine* or *Brāhmaṇ sebadhi*, and Bhabānīcaraṇ Bandyopādhyāy with Tārācāṃd Datta the weekly *Sambād kaumudī* (*The Lotus of the News*), both in 1821. From the very beginning, polemics concerning religious and other topics occupied an important part of these papers. Other periodicals followed in rather rapid succession, some short-lived, others of primary importance. Among the latter, Bhabānīcaraṇ's *Samācār candrikā* (*Moonshine of the News*, founded 1822), Īśvarcandra Gupta's *Sambād prabhākar* (*The Sun of the News*, 1831) and the organ of the Hindu College students, *Jñānanveśan*²²¹ (*Search for Knowledge*, 1831) deserve special mention.

It is indeed impossible to overrate the important role assigned to these weeklies and monthlies. They provided the main platform for the clash of ideas and the chief medium for the propagation of new trends and dissemination of useful knowledge, and for decades filled up the gap caused by the non-existence of modern literature which was only then coming into existence; it was these periodicals in which the first literary attempts were published. They acted as a school for young aspirants to literature, and more than once provided writers with a living. Readers got quickly accustomed to this new medium of information and knowledge, as may be concluded from the number of no less than twenty-five periodicals founded during the initial fifteen years of journalism in Bengal.²²²

Among the first attempts at a more ambitious prose, rare as they were till the fifties, Bhabānīcaraṇ Bandyopādhyāy's (1787–1848) writings stand out, in spite of all their defects. The first was *Kalikātā-kamalālay* (*The Lotus Abode of Calcutta*) from 1823. It is written in the form of a dialogue between an inhabitant of Calcutta and a visitor from the village to whom the former explains, with a good deal of humour and irony, certain customs prevailing in the city and altogether unknown in the countryside. In 1825 and 1831 respectively, Bhabānīcaraṇ published two social satires, *Nababābubilās* (*Pleasures of the New Bourgeois*) and *Nababibibilās* (*Pleasures of the New Dame*), ridiculing various vices of some inhabitants of the capital. In prose intermixed with verse, the author narrates stories of the bad consequences which drinking, adultery and exaggerated luxury bring to those who have forgotten to watch their steps and given up the good old ways (the author was a distinguished member of the

²²¹ See AMAR DATTA, *Dirozio o Dirozīyāns*. Calcutta 1973.

²²² ASITKUMĀR BANDYOPĀDHYĀY, *USP*, p. 89. A large and well conceived selection of articles which appeared in various Bengali periodicals in the 19th century, is the four-volumes *Sāmayīkpatre Bāṃlār samājeitra*, edited by BINAY GHOSH at Calcutta, 1962–5.

orthodox group). The Nababibilās has even a central plot, however thin, following the decay of an unfaithful wife through four stages till her miserable end and final lament and warning to all married women:

"I therefore again and again ask you:
Protect the sanctity of your families, O wives."

Obviously it was not entertainment or even aesthetic relish which was expected and obtained from these new writings, but knowledge and education. The same is true of the early translations of Western literature and adaptations of European, first of all English models. Though no complete list of these translations is available, the titles known indicate in a clear manner that didactic and informative works were more in demand than belles-lettres. The main interest centred round books on history,²²³ sciences and philosophy²²⁴ and a vivid response was aroused by books on self-education²²⁵ and biographies of great personalities. Even works of art literature occasionally translated during this period were probably read more as didactic works than as literature proper.²²⁶ Fables²²⁷ were looked for because of their moral lessons.

When considering European literature as one of the most important factors influencing the rise of modern Bengali literature,²²⁸ we must not confine ourselves to mere translations and adaptations. In the second quarter of the 19th century, the knowledge of English among the Bengali intelligentsia reached a relatively high standard and books written in English or translated into English from German, French and other languages including Latin and Greek, were thus accessible to them in that language. The steady and effective growth of modern education is testified to by the establishment of such specialized institutions as the Medical College (1835) and the Mechanical Institute (1839), and even colleges outside Calcutta (the Krishnagar College, for instance, was founded in 1845).

A similar progress of general enlightenment may be observed in other fields. Lectures and public discussions were the main object of the Academic Association, founded in 1827–8 by H. L. Vivian Derozio, the Sādhāraṇ jñānopārjikā sabhā or Society for the Acquisition of General Knowledge, started in 1838 with Pyāricāṃd Mitra and Rāmtanu Lāhiṛī as its secretaries, and the Tattva-

²²³ E.g. Goldsmith's *History of England*, 1820, and *History of Greece*, 1833.

²²⁴ E.g. Yates' *Elements of Natural Philosophy*, 1825; Spurzheim-Combe's *Treatise on Phrenology*, 1849; Watts' *Improvement of Mind*, 1849, etc.

²²⁵ E.g. Samuel Smiles' *Character and Self-Help*, and Chambers' *Moral Class Book*.

²²⁶ Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*, 1821; Adams' *King's Messenger*, 1849; Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, 1852, etc.

²²⁷ E.g. those by Gay appeared in 1836 and those by Aesop in 1855, having their 13th edition in 1868.

²²⁸ On these influences, see P. R. SEN, *Western Influence in Bengali Literature*, Calcutta 1932 (1966); HARENDRA MOHAN DAS GUPTA, *Studies in Western Influence on Nineteenth Century Bengali Poetry, 1857–1887*, Calcutta 1935 (1969); UJJVAL-KUMĀR MAJUMDĀR, *Bāṃlā kābye pāścātya prabhāb*, Calcutta 1968.

bodhini sabhā, established by Debendranāth Thākura in 1839. In 1843 the British India Society was founded, re-named, in 1851, the British Indian Association; it was the first political society "for the purpose of adopting measures which may contribute to the welfare of the country."²²⁹

The remarkable qualitative progress of the modernization process may well be followed on the pages of various Bengali monthlies and weeklies as well as in various compilations of different branches of knowledge, among which the thirteen-volume Encyclopaedia Bengalensis or Bidyā-kalpadrum deserves special attention. It was translated or freely compiled from English sources by the Rev. Kṛṣṇamohan Bandyopādhyāy (1813–55) in 1846–51 and treated various subjects, such as history, biographies of outstanding personalities, geography, geometry etc. Even higher was the level of numerous didactic and polemical articles by Akṣaykumār Datta (1820–86),²³⁰ a rationalist enthusiastically searching for useful knowledge wherever it might be found. His following words, dating from 1854, are characteristic not only of his personal belief, but also of the attitude of a large number of his contemporaries: "The whole world is our *dharmaśāstra* (i.e. sacred book). Genuine knowledge is our *ācārya* (i.e. teacher). Whatever authentic knowledge was discovered by Bhāskara and Āryabhaṭṭa and Newton and Laplace is our *śāstra*, too. Also every natural truth revealed by Gautama and Kaṇāda and Bacon and Combe is our *śāstra*."²³¹

It must be repeated, however, that ideas of this kind were not shared by all Bengali intellectuals, at that time. There were still many who preferred the *purāṇas* and Bhāratcandra to English science and European philosophy, and there were personalities of considerable talent and influence among them. Greatest of all, the poet and journalist Īśvarcandra Gupta (1812–1859)²³² was a prolific versifier. Though the number of 50,000 poems he was reported to write by an editor of his poetry, Gopālcandra Mukhopādhyāy,²³³ is no doubt an exaggeration, his poetic output is astonishing. It appeared on the pages of the four weeklies he was editing as well as in the daily Sambād prabhākar which he founded in 1839. Apart from his own poems and those written by his contemporaries, he also published here articles on old *kabīwālās*, with numerous samples of their songs which otherwise would have been irretrievably lost.

He was literally in love with this old-type poetry and in the form of his own poems he took his lessons from them. His characteristic feature was to comment, in verse, upon anything and everything he saw and witnessed, both in Calcutta and during his frequent travels in the countryside. "The *payār*," says Asit Bandyopādhyāy, "was changed in his hands into an implement as easy as

²²⁹ ASITKUMĀR BANDYOPĀDHYĀY, USP, p. 396.

²³⁰ NAKURCANDRA BIŚVĀS, Akṣaycarita, Calcutta 1887.

²³¹ The Bengali text quoted in S. K. DE, BLNC, pp. 609–10.

²³² BHABATOṢ DATTA, Īśvarcandra Gupter jībanacarita o kabitva, Calcutta 1968; SAṆJĪBKUMĀR BASU, Īśvarcandra Gupta o Bāṅlā sāhitya. Preface by SUNĪTIKUMĀR CATTOṢĀDHYĀY, Calcutta 1964.

²³³ ASITKUMĀR BANDYOPĀDHYĀY, USP, p. 183.

prose.”²³⁴ In his outlook, however, he was extremely conservative and sometimes even reactionary. He opposed English education, social reforms, changes in old Hindu customs, in short everything connected with the modernization movement. His main weapon was ridicule and satire, sometimes witty, but often raw and of bad taste. In one respect, however, his poetry must be admired and appreciated—in his close contact with his time and untiring efforts to take part, through his verse, in the contemporary cultural development.

The very opposite of Īśvarcandra Gupta was his younger contemporary, Īśvarcandra Śarmā Bidyāsāgar (1820–1891)²³⁵ in whom the initial phase of the modernization movement in Bengal found its culmination.

Īśvarcandra Śarmā's life was connected with the Sanskrit College, founded in Calcutta in 1824 as a sort of counter-balance to the English-oriented Hindu College. Īśvarcandra, who was the son of a poor village Brahmin, studied at the Sanskrit College and it was here, too, that he graduated in 1841, obtaining the title of Vidyāsāgara (Bidyāsāgar, in Bengali spelling, i.e. Ocean of Wisdom) under which he has been known ever afterwards. After a short period at Fort William College, he returned to the Sanskrit College to become its Principal, in 1851. Education was the main field of his tireless activities. Though a Sanskrit scholar, he perfectly understood the importance of modern education and greatly contributed to the modernization of the then schools in Calcutta and the increase of the scope and quality of schools for girls. It was for schools also that the majority of his books were written, intended to serve as textbooks; but their importance far surpassed this original modest purpose.

As a man of unbending morals and firm principles, Bidyāsāgar was not willing to put up with any social products of Hinduism which he considered an obstacle in the way of progress. In 1855 he wrote two pamphlets attacking the deeply-rooted prejudice against the right of Hindu widows to re-marriage (Bidhabā-bibāha pracalita hawā ucit kinā etadbiṣayak prastāb, and, dvitīya prastāb), thus starting a wide movement and fierce controversy on this question. The direct result of it was the Widow Remarriage Act, passed in 1856. In 1871 and 1873, he entered the same arena again, this time appealing to his countrymen to abandon the practice of polygamy (Bahubibāha rahita hawā ucit ki nā etadbiṣayak bicār). Both these movements called forth a lively response, both positive and negative, among the Bengali intellectuals and, as will be seen later, even supplied the newly arising modern drama, prose and poetry with fruitful inspiration.

All historians of Bengali literature agree in that his prose writings, though no original piece of belles-lettres is to be found among them, belong to the most important foundation stones of modern Bengali prose. “Though only textbooks,” says J. C. Ghosh, “they are nevertheless important for the reason that

²³⁴ Ibid., p. 188.

²³⁵ His writings were edited, under the title *Bidyāsāgar racanābali*, by DEBKUMĀR BASU, 3 vols., Calcutta 1966; cf. also CAṆḌĪCARAṆ BANDYOPĀDHYĀY, *Bidyāsāgar*, 3rd ed., Calcutta 1909.

it was partly through them that Vidyāsāgar carried out his great work of reforming the Bengali language. Before him the language was uncouth and unshaped, and in confusion, but Vidyāsāgar gave it order and system, clear meaning and correct form.”²³⁶ He was obviously the first Bengali writer to devote systematic attention to the language of his writings, “changing words, remodelling phrases and adjusting the order of both, with the result that in his best compositions he achieved a rhythm and propriety of diction hitherto little known in Bengali prose.”²³⁷

Many of his books were either translations and adaptations or free re-tellings of both Sanskrit and English originals. Of the former, the *Betāl pañcabimśati* (1847, *Vetālapañcaviṃśati*, but based on a Hindi adaptation from 1805), the *Śakuntalā* (1854, retelling the famous drama by Kālidāsa in prose) and the *Sītār banabās* (1860, retelling in the same manner Bhavabhūti’s *Uttararāma-carita*) are known best. Among the books based on English works, mention must be made of the *Bāṅgālār itihās* (History of Bengal, 1848, original by John Clark Marshman), the *Jīban carita* (Biographies, 1849) and the *Caritābali* (Lives, 1856) both meant to set examples of successful men of the past for the youth of the country, the *Kathāmālā* (1856, Garland of Stories, retelling Aesop’s fables according to Rev. Thomas James), and especially the *Bhrāntibilās* (1869, Shakespeare’s Comedy of Errors).

All these books were used as textbooks in Bengali schools for a long time, as were also Bidyāsāgar’s excellent description of the Sanskrit language and literature (*Samśkr̥tabhāṣā o samśkr̥ta sāhitya biṣayak prastāb*, 1853) and his other manuals of Bengali as well as Sanskrit.

Towards the very end of the first half of the 19th century and in the beginning of the fifties, the soil was well prepared for the appearance of the first harvest of modern Bengali literature. In 1851, the important Vernacular Literature Society was founded to take care of more ambitious ventures in the realm of literature, both translations and original writings. In the same year, the illustrated monthly *Bibidhārtha-saṃgraha* (Various Collections) was started by Rājendralāl Mitra and in 1854, the *Māsik patrikā* (Monthly Magazine) by Pyāricāṃd Mitra and Rādhānāth Śikdār, both publishing numerous contributions marked by a far better taste and a higher level than the preceding journals. Rājendralāl Mitra (1822–1891) was a distinguished Oriental scholar, editor of numerous Sanskrit texts and author of such books as *Prākṛta bhūgal* (Physical Geography, 1954) and *Śibājīr caritra* (The Life of Śivājī, 1860), testifying to a steady progress in various branches of studies in Bengali.

It was especially historiography which in the fifties entered a new stage. In 1857 Nīlmaṇi Basāk published his *Bhāratbarṣer itihās* (History of India) proclaiming a new attitude towards the past of the country. It was the spirit

²³⁶ J. C. GHOSH, BL, p. 124.

²³⁷ T. W. CLARK, Bengali Prose Fiction up to Bankimchandra. In: *The Novel in India*, London 1970, p. 33.

of patriotism based on knowledge (though sometimes idealized and romanticized, undoubtedly) of India's past glory and able to evoke feelings of national pride in both students and writers. We shall see, in one of the next chapters, of what importance this fact was for the birth of the modern Bengali novel.

It was not till the fifties that the protagonists of the modernization movement realized the limitations of their activities, confined to the narrow stratum of intellectuals, and the necessity to influence also the broader strata of the people. During the whole first half of the century, this field was left to those who continued the tradition of the *kabigān*, *ākhṛāi* and *yātrā* as well as to a peculiar sort of "new literature," very cheap booklets, in verse or prose, narrating love stories without any pretensions to a higher literary or moral standard. As indicated by their numerous editions and high numbers of copies printed, they must have been very popular, providing cheap entertainment to many.

This was probably the main reason which prompted authors such as Pyāricāṃd Mitra to experiment in the field of narrative prose which, in spite of retaining the didactic tendency prevailing in previous books, added a new element—stories as interesting as possible, with numerous realistic elements and motives taken over from everyday life.

Pyāricāṃd Mitra (1814–1883),²³⁸ using the pen-name Ṭekcāṃd Ṭhākur, was the most important representative of this new literature. Librarian of the Calcutta Public Library and businessman by profession, he was an ardent participant of the modernization movement and a member of many bodies and associations. We have already mentioned the magazine *Māsik patrikā* which he founded and continued to co-edit for several years, "for ordinary people, especially women," as its superscription announced.²³⁹ Since the very beginning, many stories immediately reacting to social problems of the day appeared in its pages, such as the remarriage of widows, the consequences of immorality and bad education, etc. Most important of all, Mitra's own novel *Ālāler gharer Dulāl* (the title was aptly interpreted by Sukumar Sen²⁴⁰ as *Pampered Son of a Front Rank Family*) started to appear here in continuations, in 1855. Being the first novel written by a Bengali²⁴¹ it deserves more attention than its literary qualities would perhaps justify.

Characteristic are its Prefaces, one in English and one in Bengali, the latter stating: "This book has been written in consideration of the fact that in the minds of almost all people, there is an inborn and naturally stronger inclination to read novels and similar books than any other writings, and that it is especially necessary to supply such books which the people of our country are still not accustomed to read." In the English Preface, then, foreigners are informed that

²³⁸ BRAJENDRANĀTH BANDYOPĀDHYĀY, *Pyāricāṃd Mitra*, Calcutta 1955.

²³⁹ S. K. DE, BLNC, p. 603.

²⁴⁰ SUKUMAR SEN, HBL, p. 230.

²⁴¹ It was preceded only by the *Phulmaṇi o Karuṇār bicār*, but its author was an Englishwoman, the missionary H. C. Mulen.

the book is "the first work of the kind" and that it "chiefly treats of the pernicious effects of allowing children to be improperly brought up, with remarks on the existing system of education, on self-formation and religious culture, and is illustrative of the condition of Hindu society customs, and partly of the state of things in the Moffussil. The work has been written in a simple style, and to foreigners desirous of acquiring an idiomatic knowledge of the Bengali language and an acquaintance with Hindu domestic life, it will perhaps be found useful."²⁴²

The heroes of the book are two sons of the wealthy Bāburām of Baidyābāti, the spoiled elder brother Matilāl and the good younger son Rāmlāl. Matilāl is sent to Calcutta to learn English, but he immediately joins the company of some equally bad boys of the city and escapes imprisonment only by the intervention of the father's influential friends. Matilāl continues his bad career at home and finally succeeds in wasting all property he has inherited after his father's death. His younger brother Rāmlāl is his very opposite, first of all thanks to the good education which he has obtained from a certain Baradāprasād, an enlightened man of firm moral principles. At the end, it is, of course, Rāmlāl who rescues the family and brings his reclaimed brother back home.

The story needs hardly much comment, but is enriched by a number of realistic episodes, depicted in a lively way and with an obvious sense of dramatic tension. The book reads well, thanks to its simple style and very colloquial language which was praised high by the great novelist Baṅkimcandra Caṭṭopādhyāy. To use his words, Pyāricāṇḍ Mitra "was the first to demonstrate that a book could be written in the Bengali which is spoken by ordinary people."²⁴³ The author drew on the colloquial speech of Calcutta and its environs and his novel facilitated the acceptance of colloquialisms and dialectical expressions into modern literature, especially in passages of direct speech.

Pyāricāṇḍ Mitra wrote a number of other books as well, for instance, *Mad khāwā bara dāy jāt thākār ki upāy* (It Is a Great Peril to Drink Spirits, How Can One Preserve his Caste Then?, 1859) or the allegorical novel *Abhedī* (Similar, 1871), but it is his *Ālāler gharer Dulāl* which will be always remembered as the initial step in the development of the modern Bengali novel. In this respect, it represents not only the conclusion of the preparatory stage of modern Bengali literature, but marks also the beginning of a new period characterized by the rise of different literary genres.

²⁴² Edition of Basumatī-sāhitya-mandir, along with two further books. Calcutta s. d., p. 142.

²⁴³ Quoted by T. W. CLARK, op. cit., p. 37.

THE MODERN DRAMA AND DĪNABANDHU MITRA

Until 1852, not a single original drama had been written in Bengali, but theatrical performances did take place in Calcutta since the end of the 18th century. In 1795, the Russian musician Gerasim Lebedeff staged here a Bengali rendering of the English play *The Disguise*²⁴⁴ which he translated with the help of his teacher Goloknāth Dās, and after two successful performances he added yet another play entitled *Love is the Best Doctor* (author unknown). It was, however, an isolated venture. During the first half of the 19th century, the *yātrā* dominated the Calcutta stage with traditional subjects of which the Bidyā-Sundar story was the most favourite one. Even occasional performances of dramas in English, either by Bengali students or professional groups from abroad, did not immediately lead to any kind of imitation in Bengali.

In 1852, Tārācaran Śikdār's *Bhadrārjun* and Yogendracandra Gupta's *Kirtibilās* appeared, the former being a dramatic version of a Mahābhārata episode and the latter a dramatization of a Bengali folk-tale. Within the following twenty years, then, no less than two hundred dramas were published in Bengali, in 1880 reaching the impressive total of nearly 700.²⁴⁵ It was a period of a real boom of drama in Bengal, the intensity and abnormality of which strikes us even more if we consider that until 1872 not a single professional stage existed in the country. And, to list all the anomalies, only few of these numerous dramas were written by real playwrights, the majority being the work of amateurs who tried their skill at the art of writing a play but once and abandoned their efforts after the first attempt.

The first two dramas mentioned above introduced certain novelties and innovations as yet unknown in Indian plays, such as the division of acts into scenes and even, in the case of the *Kirtibilās*, the tragic ending; but they did not differ from what had preceded (either Sanskrit plays or Bengali *yātrās*) in the most essential respects—in the traditional themes and, primarily, the ideology, the very purpose of these creations. For this reason, they can hardly be held responsible for the mighty wave of dramatic writings to follow in the subsequent years. Neither did the following year, 1853, bring anything new in this field, apart from a free translation of Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* (under the title *Bhānumati cittabilās*, by Haracandra Ghosh). And thus it was not until 1854 that the really revolutionary event in the realm of Bengali drama was witnessed—the creation of the *Rāmnārāyaṇ* Tarkaratna's *Kulīn kula-sarbasva* (the title translated by Sukumar Sen²⁴⁶ as *The Top-ranking Brahman All For Prestige*).

²⁴⁴ Probably by Richard Paul Jaddrell, according to S. K. DE, BLNC, p. 640, or by Chapman, as said by SUKUMAR SEN, HBL, p. 191.

²⁴⁵ See the Bibliography attached to the article, *The Beginnings of the Modern Bengali Drama (1852–1880)*, by DUŠAN ZBAVITEL. ArOr 36, 1968, pp. 29–66.

²⁴⁶ SUKUMAR SEN, HBL, p. 195.

The very impetus for writing this drama was somewhat typical of the whole atmosphere. It was literally ordered by Kālicandra Rāycaudhurī, a zamindar from Rangpur, who in 1853 published the following announcement in Sambād bhāskar, Raṅgpur bartābaha and some other journals:

"All learned gentlemen are notified, through this announcement that he who by writing within six months an enchanting *nāṭak* called Kulīn kulasarbasva in graceful Bengali, shows his supremacy among writers, will be presented with a prize of 50 rupees."²⁴⁷

The very title of the work and the progressive views of the enlightened Rangpur zamindar, who had made the offer, left no doubt about the tendency with which the proposed book was expected to be imbued. In this respect, the play submitted by Rāmnārāyaṇ Tarkaratna evidently complied with the expectations. It was directed against a cruel Hindu custom, the Kulin form of marriage, and showed its barbarity and injustice in a rather simple, but touching story of four daughters of a village Brahmin, who were given to marriage, all at once, to an old and stupid man, only in order to follow a deeply-rooted tradition, regardless of the happiness or tragedy of the human lives involved.

In spite of its dramatic imperfections and artistic weaknesses, readily understood in a pioneer work of this kind, Rāmnārāyaṇ's drama had all the qualities needed to become a signpost for further dramatic creation and an example to be followed. It was in perfect accord with the ideological tendencies then prevailing among the Bengali intelligentsia—and Calcutta middle-class, in general—and aimed at reforming Hinduism in the spirit of progress.

There is, however, much doubt whether the author ever had a stage performance of his drama in mind. We do not even know for certain, whether the book ordered by the Rangpur zamindar was supposed to be a drama at all. The term *nāṭak* used in his announcement should not be taken literally, as at that time the word was used indiscriminately to denote different kinds of poetic fiction, as Sukumar Sen has rightly stated.²⁴⁸ On the other hand, the first original Bengali drama mentioned above, Bhadrārjun by Tārācaraṇ Śikdār, did not bear the word *nāṭak* in its title, as the majority of later Bengali dramas do. We must also remember that at that time, not only was there no professional stage in Calcutta, but even amateur performances were very rare. From this point of view it was really a revolutionary event that Rāmnārāyaṇ Tarkaratna gave his work the form of a drama, and the fact that shortly afterwards many followed suit and that as early as 1857 his play was staged,²⁴⁹ only shows how

²⁴⁷ Quoted in ĀSUTOṢ BHATṬĀCĀRYA, *Bāṅlā sāmājīk nāṭaker bibartan*. Calcutta 1964, p. 40.

²⁴⁸ SUKUMĀR SEN, *Bāṅgālā sāhityer itihās*, II, 3rd ed., Calcutta 1955, pp. 18 and 27. Other instances can be quoted, from the collections of the India Office Library in London, such as the Premopadeś *nāṭak*, by Biśveśvar Ghoṣ, or Nabarāmaṇī *nāṭak*, by Śyāmācaraṇ Bandyopādhyāy, both being epic poems.

²⁴⁹ In Nāṭun-Bājār, in the house of Rāmjay Basāk.

keen his enlightened contemporaries were to utilize every means of reaching their common goal—the modernization of their society.

Other evidence of the fact that early social dramas in Bengali were not written to be performed on the stage can be found in various introductions and prefaces of plays which were published in the following years. Thus in his English preface to the second edition of his *Bidhabābibāha* (*The Marriage of a Widow*),²⁵⁰ Umeścandra Mitra confessed:

“Composed originally with a view to aid a good but not a very popular cause, the piece was simply adapted to the circumstances of the time. The author intended it neither for the stage nor for a permanent place in the vernacular library . . .”

And even as late as in 1864, Yadunāth Caṭṭopādhyāy wrote in a preface to his play *Bidhabābilās* (*Pleasures of a Widow*): “*Bidhabābilās* is no drama. It is merely a description of the natural situation of this country, in the form of a drama.”

Nevertheless, as stated above, the full significance of Rāmnārāyaṇ’s deed and the possibilities which the drama offered in the current campaign against social evils and orthodox Hindu practices and traditions were soon grasped; once these plays started to be staged, it was easy to understand that the drama was a weapon more suited than any other literary genre to help a cause which required as much popularity as possible, because it could use instances drawn directly from life and, moreover, could reach even the illiterate masses, who had no access to the written word.²⁵¹

The seed sown by Rāmnārāyaṇ Tarkaratna began to yield a rich crop by 1856.²⁵² In this year, his drama was followed by at least four further plays, all of them written in support of the remarriage of widows, prohibited by Hindu traditions: the anonymous *Bidhabā biṣam bipad* (*A Widow is a Great Calamity*), Umācaraṇ Caṭṭopādhyāy’s bulky *Bidhabodbāha* (*The Marriage of a Widow*), Umeścandra Mitra’s *Bidhabābibāha* (*ditto*) and Rādhāmādhav Mitra’s *Bi-*

²⁵⁰ The 1st edition appeared in 1856.

²⁵¹ However obvious this idea might appear to us today, it is rather surprising that it was not utilized in other Asian literatures during the analogous process of their modernization. Though the Japanese, Chinese and Persian literatures, for instance, show numerous analogies with the Bengali in the initial stage of their modern period, especially in the prevailing tendencies towards enlightenment and instruction, they practically never developed any modern dramatic form with such purpose as the Bengali drama of the fifties and sixties was imbued with. In the case of Iran, the well-known prejudice of Islam against people appearing on the stage might have played the decisive role. But in Japan and China no such prejudice has ever existed. In these two countries, however, there was a very strong tradition of classical theatrical forms, which was still living at the time of the birth of modern literature. This tradition, along with folk “dramas,” has probably so completely monopolized the stage that it was impossible to introduce modern forms capable of propagating modernizing tendencies and modern ideas.

²⁵² Yet another play by Kālīprasannā Siṃha, *Bābu nāṭak*, is known to have been published in 1854, but is obviously irretrievably lost.

dhābāmanorañjan (The Entertainments of a Widow). These dramas, seen from another and no less significant point of view, were immediately preceded by Īśvarcandra Bidyāsāgar's famous treatises on the re-marriage of widows, mentioned in the preceding chapter, which opened another branch of the campaign against orthodox Hindu customs. Since the very beginning of the sixties, then, the main attention of Bengali playwrights turned against other social evils of orthodox Hinduism, especially against child marriages and polygamy.

In the decade 1856-65, altogether eighty original Bengali dramas²⁵³ were written (or at least are known to have been written), out of which 60, i.e. a full 75%, treated contemporary social themes. Apart from the subjects mentioned above—Kulinism, polygamy, infant-marriages and the prohibition of widows' re-marriages—they fought against marrying young girls to old men, against Hindu superstitions and idolatry and—especially from 1863—against immorality and drunkenness, which must, at that time, have reached a considerable extent in the city of Calcutta. Gradually, during the subsequent years, the latter subjects grew in frequency, to the detriment of the former; besides immorality and alcoholism, prostitution, illicit love relations and opium and tobacco smoking appeared as favourite subjects for playwrights, as well as the backwardness of village life, the lack of education (especially among women) and, in the seventies, the unsuitable and ridiculous behaviour of modern Bengali *bābus* trying to imitate the English in all respects.

As stated already, many of these dramas were written by "one-book-authors" and others were published anonymously. Thus only a few writers must be mentioned as the most outstanding contemporary playwrights.

Rāmnārāyaṇ Tarkaratna (1822-1886) was no doubt one of them, not only for his pioneer Kulin kulasarbasva, but also for at least fourteen other plays, both social dramas of didactic character and translations of Sanskrit books. Among the latter, his Bengali versions of Bhaṭṭanārāyaṇa's *Veṇīsaṃhāra* (1856), Haṛṣadeva's *Ratnāvalī* (1858) and Kālidāsa's *Śakuntalā* (1860) must be mentioned. Among his original writings, *Nabanāṭak* (1866)²⁵⁴ deserves more attention. In his last dramas, *Kaṃsabadh* (The Death of Kaṃsa, 1875) and *Dharmabijay* (The Victory of Truth, 1875) Rāmnārāyaṇ turned towards mythological subjects.

At least nine plays were contributed by Hariścandra Mitra (1838-1872), partly with contemporary subjects (e.g. *Sapatnī kalaha*, The Row with the Wife, and *Hatabhāgya-śikṣak*, The Poor Teacher, both 1872), and partly with mythological contents; and almost two scores by Bholānāth Mukhopādhyāy,

²⁵³ Not counting 21 translations, out of which three were from English and the rest from Sanskrit.

²⁵⁴ BRAJENDRANĀTH BANDYOPĀDHYĀY gives the full title as *Bahubibāha prabhṛti kuprathā biṣayak naba-nāṭak*, i.e. The New Drama Concerning Polygamy and Other Bad Customs, *Baṅgīya nāṭyaśālār itihās 1795-1876*. Calcutta, 3rd ed. 1946, pp. 193-216.

starting with *Āpanār mukh āpani dekha* (Look at Your Own Face) and *Koner mā kāmde ār ṭākār pumṭli bāmdhe* (The Girl's Mother Weeps and Ties the Purse with Money), in 1863. Of much importance were six plays by the poet Madhusūdan Datta whose work we shall, however, treat in the next chapter. The greatest representative of the Bengali drama in this period was Dinabandhu Mitra.

Dinabandhu Mitra (1829–1874),²⁵⁵ a pupil of Īśvarcandra Gupta and a postal officer by profession, created a sensation with his very first drama, *Nīldarpaṇ* (Blue Mirror, 1860). It described, in the form of a Shakespearean tragedy, the sufferings inflicted upon Bengali cultivators of indigo by British planters who had a monopoly control of this important culture. "From the point of view of its artistic qualities, the *Nīldarpaṇ* is not a successful play," state Alokrañjan Dāsgupta and Debīprasād Bandyopādhyāy;²⁵⁶ and similar judgments have been passed upon the drama by other modern historians of Bengali literature. The play no doubt reveals the immaturity of this particular genre in Bengali; yet some of its characters are very good and their dialogues (often in dialect) show a talented dramatist. Far more important, however, were the economic and political consequences of this drama. It was translated into English by Madhusūdan Datta, but published under the name of Rev. Long²⁵⁷ who was then prosecuted, fined and imprisoned, but the play contributed to the abolition of the planters' monopoly.

Dinabandhu Mitra was the author of six other plays. In 1863, his *Nabīn tapasvinī* (The New Female Ascetic) appeared, with Shakespeare's *Merry Wives of Windsor* as its model, to be followed by two social satires in 1866, *Biyepāglā buro* (A Marriage-crazy Old Man) and *Sadhabār ekādaśī* (The Widow-feast of a Married Woman). The latter is rightly said by Sukumar Sen²⁵⁸ to be the best play of the author. In this as well as his other satires—the last was *Jāmāi-bārik* (The House of the Son-in-Law, 1872)—Dinabandhu proved his skill in portraying living characters of well-known personalities of the then Calcutta. The main target, however, were certain social vices and survivals, in the spirit of the modernization movement. The remaining two plays, the *Līlābatī* (1867) and the semi-historical *Kamale-kāminī* (1873) were less successful.

"The comic sense of life was sharper in him than that of tragedy," state modern critics,²⁵⁹ and to a modern reader and audience—Dinabandhu is the only playwright of that period whose dramas still appear on the Bengali stage nowadays—his comedies certainly appeal more than his tragedies. Nevertheless, it is his *Nīldarpaṇ* which has remained his chef-d'œuvre, not only for its

²⁵⁵ SUŚĪLKUMĀR DE, Dinabandhu Mitra, Calcutta 1960.

²⁵⁶ BSR, p. 314.

²⁵⁷ Calcutta 1861.

²⁵⁸ SUKUMAR SEN, HBL, p. 200.

²⁵⁹ ALOKRAÑJAN DĀSGUPTA and DEBĪPRASĀD BANDYOPĀDHYĀY, BSR, p. 315.

political significance but also because of being the first modern drama about the Bengali village lore.

Since 1873, immediately after the first professional theatre was established in Calcutta,²⁶⁰ a new element was added to the list of dramatic subjects—and one which at once dominated the creative activity of the Bengali playwrights. This was actual happenings, especially such as had ended before a court of justice. During the period of 1873–78, at least thirty-four dramas were written with such subjects; and the majority chose the Tārākeśvar scandal for their theme.

It was an interesting case, indeed. The *mahant*, the high priest of the well-known Shivaist temple in Tārākeśvar, with the help of the young woman's stepmother, seduced Elokēśī, the young wife of a certain Nabīn Bandyopādhyāy who then killed her and was sentenced to life-imprisonment. Nor did the main culprit, the vicious *mahant*, escape justice; he was found guilty, after a public campaign, and sentenced to three years' imprisonment and a heavy fine. Nabīn was released after a few years, in accordance with public opinion expressed in numerous articles in the press and petitions sent to British authorities.

We shall hardly ever know who was the first to describe this tragedy in the form of a drama, but it was certainly no author of great fame. In any case, his play must have been exceptionally successful, as within the next months it was followed by a large number of other plays elaborating the theme. Thus Surencandra Bandyopādhyāy wrote no less than six of them and altogether at least twenty-three dramas about the Tārākeśvar scandal were published, besides nine books of verse and two of prose. Not only were these plays edited and sold in large numbers of copies; some of them were also staged in the recently established professional theatres, and evidently attracted larger audiences than any other dramas before.²⁶¹

The majority of the authors chose the simplest possible method of presenting the theme; they merely described the whole affair, more or less accurately, as it really happened, inserting some allusions or some sort of moral instruction here and there. Quite exceptionally we find pieces—like *Nimāicāṃd Śil's* *Tirthamahimā* (The Glory of a Sacred Place, 1873)—which use the actual plot of the event as a mere basis, not hesitating to distort the facts in order to create a more independent, original piece of fiction. Then, however, *Nimāicāṃd Śil* was an experienced playwright, who had already written during the decade preceding these happenings.

²⁶⁰ It was the National Theatre, which opened on the 7th December 1872, and was very soon followed by the Great National Theatre and the Bengal Theatre.

²⁶¹ *Āśuṭoṣ Bhaṭṭācārya* (*Bāmlā sāmājīk nāṭaker bibartan*, ed. cit., pp. 360–1) quotes the reminiscences of the playwright Amṛtalāl Basu and one of his plays, to prove this fact. As we learn from Brajendranāth Bandyopādhyāy's mentioned book, various plays about the Tārākeśvar scandal were staged several times, in the National Theatre as well as the Bengal Theatre.

In the overwhelming majority, the dramas side with Nabīn, the actual murderer, try to depict Elopeśī as an innocent victim and condemn the parents of the poor wife and especially the vicious *mahant*. They use the darkest shades in portraying him as an immoral individual, a drunkard, a seducer of other men's wives, even as an oppressor of the villagers, using his religious function only to enrich himself, to gain easier access to the objects of his vicious desires and to his immoral way of life. In this respect, the dramas were doubtless a part of the general campaign for the release of Nabīn. But they were more than that—they followed the same aims as the preceding dramas against Kulinism, polygamy etc., only with slightly different targets: the purification of contemporary Hinduism from all kinds of distortions and aberrations unwanted by modern believers.

To verify this fact, it is sufficient to quote at least one of the numerous prefaces of the Tārākeśvar dramas—that written by Yogendranāth Ghoṣ in his *Mohanter ei ki daśā!* (What a State of a Mahant!, 1873):

“With the proof of his adultery with Elopeśī, it has now been made generally known what a scoundrel, villain, cannibal and demon in human form, the Tārākeśvar *mahant* Mādhav Giri was, though a Hindu, and how many hundreds of wicked deeds he had done since the day when he tarnished the good name of our faith, usurping the throne of religion. Villains endowed with human strength and the power of money and pretending piety in addition, can perpetrate almost all the sins the world can think of, but whether at once or delayed, always, in the end, religion will be triumphant, the truth will be triumphant (underlined by the author) . . . I wrote the present drama in order to remind the Bengalis of these events.”

The Tārākeśvar dramas did not remain the only plays which took actual events for their subjects. They were soon followed, for instance, by the anonymous Great Barbers Drama, *Nāpiteśvar nāṭak* (with its curious bilingual title, 1873), on another contemporary affair and trial; by two dramas depicting the “war” for markets in Calcutta; and especially by a number of plays relating the trial of Malhār Rāo, the Gaikwar of Baroda, which aroused much indignation towards the British in all India (1874).

At that time, however, the contemporary and social themes began to recede into the background in Bengali drama, giving way to more and more frequent mythological plays and historical and romantic dramas. As most historians of Bengali literature conclude, it was a natural consequence of the generally low level of plays with contemporary subjects and a reaction to the glut of poorly written pieces. There is no doubt that it is rather difficult to find, in that immense heap of social plays, many pieces with higher artistic ambitions and aesthetic values. But other circumstances must be taken into consideration, too, to account fully for the playwrights' turning to mythological and historical subjects.

First of all, in the second half of the seventies, the mighty wave of socio-religious and cultural reforms seems to have started its inevitable downward

tendency. The new-born modern literature began either gradually to free itself from the immediate subjugation to non-literary and non-artistic goals, or to become more and more inspired by new ideas of patriotism and national pride; romantic tales of unhappy love, often with an historical or pseudohistorical background, started to replace social motifs, and patriotic allegories were written recalling the long-past glory of Mother India and lamenting over her enslavement by foreign barbarians; thus in 1874 at least six such allegories appeared, e.g. the plays *Bhārat adhīn?* (Is India Dependent?) by Kuñjabihārī Basu, and *Baṅger sukhābasān* (The Dawn of Bengal's Happiness), by Haralāl Rāy.

Secondly, the recently established professional theatres, depending directly on the taste, likes and dislikes of the audiences, very soon discovered that the broader strata of city society had not lost their traditional predilection for mythological stories and fairy-tales (a fact still well known, today, to Indian film-makers) as well as for unpretentious *yātrā*-like plays, richly interwoven with songs.

Finally, it grew, after the middle of the seventies, more and more difficult to bring a really bold new drama with a contemporary subject on the stage. After the Great National Theatre staged, in 1876, the farce *Gajadānanda o yubarāj* (*Gajadānanda and the Crown Prince*,²⁶²) a satirical reaction to the fact that during the visit of the Prince of Wales, in January of the same year, a group of Indian ladies had welcomed him in Calcutta in the traditional Hindu way, the police and the British authorities paid unwelcome attention to the activities of the theatres. The play mentioned above was banned as well as two others and the Dramatic Performances Control Bill was issued, considerably restricting the freedom of the theatres. As related by Brajendranāth Bandyopādhyāy, the reaction to these facts was quite natural: "After three of its plays were banned, the Great National Theater no more staged any forbidden farces and advertised simple performances."²⁶³

The change which took place between 1875-79 may be easily documented by a few figures. In 1875, dramas with contemporary subjects formed almost 50% of all plays, whereas those with mythological themes only 25%. In 1879, contemporary subjects appeared only in 16% of the published dramas, but mythological themes occupied 70% of the whole dramatic production.

The latter, elaborating mostly traditional mythological and fairy-tale stories, most often used the terms *gītābhinay* (lit. performances with songs), *gītikā* (musical poems) or *yātrā*, in their titles. In a way, all of them represent an interesting and, at least temporarily, successful attempt at the rehabilitation of the old *yātrā*, based more on the traditional Indian aesthetics than on the newly formed modern aesthetic principles. It is well testified to by the following quotation from the preface to the *Abhimanyubadhyaṭrā* (Play on the Killing of Abhimanyu, 1877), by Girīśandra Mukhopādhyāy:

²⁶² The play has not survived.

²⁶³ Op. cit., p. 177.

"But also in order to demonstrate that there is no difference between a *yātrā* and a *gītābhinay*, I called this book *yātrā*. The main object of a drama is to stimulate in the mind a certain mood (*rasa*). In the Mahābhārata, the description of the death of Abhimanyu is connected with the mood of heroism and sorrow, etc."

What a change from the uncompromisingly negative attitude of the first pioneers of the modern drama towards the *yātrā*, to this sudden outburst of enthusiasm for the same theatrical form!

Thus we must state that the modern drama did not succeed in definitely turning over the page in the development of the Bengali stage. The modern form failed to take a sufficiently firm root, during the preceding twenty years, and to prove more attractive than the traditional *yātrā*. An interesting incident may be quoted in this connection. In 1873, Manomohan Basu published his *Satī nāṭak* (Drama on Satī, i. e. Śiva's spouse) which, though purāṇic in contents, was a tragedy in its conclusion. Four years later, the second edition of the same play appeared, this time with a "happy end." Obviously the tragedy went so strongly against the millennial opposition of Indian dramaturgy that the author had "to bow to orthodox criticism."²⁶⁴

Although the first play entitled *gītābhinay* appeared already in 1866—it was Tinkari Ghoshāl's *Sābitrī Satyabān gītābhinay*—the main merit for the renaissance of the old *yātrā* in the form of a play richly interwoven with songs and dances is usually ascribed to Manomohan Basu (1831–1912). He was certainly not opposed to the reformist movement. His first two plays, *Rāmābhišek nāṭak arthāt Rāmer adhibās o banabās* (Drama of the Coronation of Rāma or Rāma's Stay at Home and in Exile, 1867) and *Praṇayaparīkṣā* (The Test of Love, 1869) were both directed against polygamy and the drama *Hariścandra* (1875) echoed the newly awakening spirit of patriotism. He was, however, an ardent lover and supporter of old traditions in literature, being a disciple of Īśvarcandra Gupta, in this respect, and proclaimed: "We wish that what had existed in this country previously, should not be destroyed but improved."²⁶⁵ These words, as a matter of fact, might be considered the motto of the whole second phase of the modernization of Bengali literature.²⁶⁶

²⁶⁴ SUKUMAR SEN, HBL, p. 202.

²⁶⁵ Quoted in ALOKRANJAN DĀSGUPTA and DEBĪPRASĀD BANDYOPĀDHYĀY, BSR, p. 316.

²⁶⁶ On the development of Bengali drama, cf. also P. GUHA-THAKURTA, *The Bengali Drama*, London 1930; ĀSUTOṢ BHATṬĀCĀRYA, *Bāṃlā nāṭyasāhityer itihās*, 2nd ed., Calcutta 1970; DEBKUMĀR BASU, *Bāṃlā nāṭak 1852–1957*, Calcutta 1957; BAIDYANĀTH ŚIL, *Bāṃlā sāhitye nāṭaker dhārā*, Calcutta 1957; B. N. BANERJEE, *Bengali stage 1795–1873*, Calcutta 1943.

THE MODERN POETRY AND MADHUSŪDAN DATTA

The main trend of 19th century Bengal, the tendency towards reform and modernization, developed to a certain extent in direct opposition to pre-modern Bengali literature and its contemporary continuations. Certainly it is no coincidence that we so often read derisive and spiteful remarks on the "obscurity" and "primitivism" of the *kabigāns* and the *yātrās* from the pen of various representatives of the modernization movement. In the old and old-fashioned poetry, pre-modern and, in a way, also anti-modern tendencies were seen embodied. This may be one of the main reasons why, during the first half of the 19th century, almost no efforts were made to use poetry as a part of the new literature, to change it into a means of communicating the modern mentality.

Neither were there any serious attempts at translating European poetry into Bengali, in that early period, with the isolated exception of a few cantos of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, in 1854; such translations, as rightly observed by Sukumar Sen, "were unacceptable to the general public and unnecessary to the English-educated reader."²⁶⁷

On the other hand, several modernists tried their skill at writing modern poetry in English. Derozio's *Fakir of Jhungeera*, Kāśīprasād Ghoṣ's *The Shair and Other Poems* (1830), Rājnarāyaṇ Datta's *Osmyn* and especially Madhusūdan Datta's *The Captive Ladie* (1849)²⁶⁸ are the most significant samples of these efforts.

Thus it was not until the fifties that original poetry of a different kind appeared in Bengali. In 1858, the *Padminī upākhyān* (Tale of Padminī) by Raṅgalāl Bandyopādhyāy (1826–1886) was published. Its author, a pupil of Īśvarcandra Gupta, was particularly interested in the history of his country. Inspired by James Tod's retellings of Rajasthani historical tales and legends ('Annals and Antiquities'), he took up, for the subject of his poem, the story of how Ālāuddin conquered Chitor and re-narrated it in the form of an old bard's canto. In his other two poems, *Karmadebī* (1862) and *Śūrasundarī* (The Brave Beauty, 1868), he drew from the same source, and in his last poem, *Kāñci-Kāberī* (1879) from an Orissan semi-historical romantic tale.

In spite of being rather poor poetry, Raṅgalāl's books echoed the newly awakening spirit of patriotism and pride in the past glory of India which was soon to take a deep root in Bengali literature. No less significant was the fact that he did not, at the same time, look for poetic examples in India's past but in England. In the Preface to his *Padminī upākhyān*, he frankly confessed: "I have studied excessively and first of all English poetry and it has been for a long time my habit to write Bengali poems in this method."²⁶⁹ Not only that, he also translated English poetry (Cooper, Milton, Parnell, Goldsmith, etc.), thus obviously preparing himself for writing original poetry "in this method."

²⁶⁷ SUKUMAR SEN, HBL, p. 205.

²⁶⁸ Reprinted, with a Bengali translation, by GAURĀṄGA PAṆḌIT, Calcutta 1957.

²⁶⁹ Quoted in ALOKRAṆJAN etc., BSR, p. 281.

Raṅgalāl's books might have been more influential, but his poetry was completely overshadowed by the works of the greatest poet of the period, Madhusūdan Datta.^{269a} He was a giant in the field and it is no exaggeration to call him a veritable landmark in the development of Bengali poetry, the modern period of which dates from his appearance.

Madhusūdan Datta (1824–1872) was born in Sāgardāṃṛi, Jessore, as the son of a rich lawyer. He studied at the Hindu College in Calcutta and was so infatuated by everything English that he became literally obsessed by it. In 1843 he was even converted to Christianity (accepting the Christian name of Michael) and continued his studies at Bishop's College, swallowing all available knowledge, especially various European as well as Asian languages and literatures. His linguistic horizon was unusually wide, including not only Sanskrit, Persian and Hebrew, but also Latin, Greek, French and Italian. In 1849, Madhusūdan left for Madras to work as a teacher and journalist till his return to Calcutta, in 1856. The following six years were his most happy period. He worked as a clerk and interpreter at the police court, married happily, for the second time, a French girl and, first of all, started to write in Bengali, his previous attempts at poetry in English having been a failure. In 1862, he travelled to England and after five nightmarish years spent in London and France came back home, with broken health and practically a poor man. He died in dissatisfaction and poverty.

Madhusūdan's first Bengali writings were dramas. In 1858, his Śarmiṣṭhā was published to be staged a year later and also translated into English by the author himself (Sermista, 1859). The story is taken from the Mahābhārata, but its spirit is very modern. It is indeed "the first Bengali play to be constructed in the modern Western style,"²⁷⁰ and "by far the best play that had yet been written in Bengali."²⁷¹ Its dialogues are in fluent prose.

His second book, Padmābatī (written in 1859 and published in 1860) was also a drama, elaborating a Greek myth in an Indian garb and combining prose with verse, but it was in poetry that his main contribution to literature was to come. In 1859 he published his epic poem Tilottamāsambhab (The Birth of Tilottamā) with a theme taken from the *purāṇas*, on how the demons Sunda and Upasunda were deceived by gods who sent a beautiful girl to incite a deadly quarrel between them. The poem is interesting in its peculiar blend of Hindu and non-Hindu mythology and the conception of its characters, but its main importance belongs to another sphere. For the first time here, Madhusūdan broke away from the verse technique of Bengali which had been used for hundreds of years and

^{269a} YOGĪNDRANĀTH BASU, *Māikel Madhusūdan Datter jibancarita*, Calcutta 1895; NAGENDRANĀTH SOM, *Madhu-smṛti*, Calcutta 1911; ŚRĪKUMĀR DĀS, *Madhusūdaner kabimānas*, Calcutta n.d.; MOHITLĀL MAJUMDĀR, *Kabi Śrīmadhusūdan*, Calcutta 1947; SATYANĀRAYAN BHATṬĀCĀRYA, *Madhusūdan-sāhitya-parikramā*, Calcutta 1965.

²⁷⁰ J. C. GHOSH, BL, p. 140.

²⁷¹ SUKUMAR SEN, HBL, p. 197.

created the *amitākṣar chanda*, the unrhymed metre, i.e. the Bengali version of the blank verse. "He took the standard fourteen-syllable line of the Bengali *Payār* and brought it as close as he could to the Miltonic model," says J. C. Ghosh. And he adds: "There can be no doubt that Madhusūdan's innovation was as epoch-making an event in Bengali literature as Marlow's mighty line was in English."²⁷²

The ties of the *payār* metre were certainly too tight to allow of the full expression of the true epic breadth and the unhampered flow of ideas. The strictly immovable caesura worked as a brake and in this respect Madhusūdan achieved very much by turning it into a movable pause. The epic verse could now come nearer to the language of prose and utilize all the potentialities of the natural rhythm of the language.

The poetic experiment of Madhusūdan did not call forth a positive response among the majority of his contemporaries. It was a novelty of so far-reaching consequences and so different from anything written so far that it had to meet with resistance. Madhusūdan, however, was not willing to listen to any adverse criticism and did the best thing to prove that his way meant a real progress in Bengali poetry. He composed another poem in the same poetic form, his greatest book, *Meghnādbadh*²⁷³ (*The Death of Meghnād*, i.e. *Indrajit*, the son of the demon-kind *Rāvaṇa*). The book divided into nine cantos appeared in 1861.

Once again Madhusūdan used a subject borrowed from the ancient Hindu mythology; though a converted Christian, he loved Hindu mythology which, to quote his own words, was "full of poetry" and exploited it in many of his writings. His attitude, of course, was not that of a devout Hindu or at least a person treating the tradition respectfully. With his characteristic spirit of rebellion, he turned characters and events upside down, depriving *Rāma* and *Lakṣmaṇa* of any divine halo and changing *Rāvaṇa* and his beloved son *Meghnād* into real heroes. In a letter to his friend *Rājnarāyaṇ Basu*, Madhusūdan confessed: "I despise *Rām* and his rabble, but the idea of *Rāvaṇ* elevates and kindles my imagination."²⁷⁴

This "re-evaluation" of the religious tradition represents, in a way, the very culmination of the modernization process which had been carried on in the culture of Bengal for the preceding sixty years. Its first step, in this respect, was the secularization of literature and its liberation from the traditional bonds with religion. Madhusūdan made yet another step forward beyond this stage. By his verse, he proclaimed the right of the poet to an individualistic and subjective approach to any subject, however sanctioned or tabooed by tradition. Modern writers and poets were now free to re-take any theme from the inexhaustible source of the past, putting their own ideas and attitudes into the ancient characters of both gods and men.

²⁷² J. C. GHOSH, BL, p. 142.

²⁷³ PRAṆAYKUMĀR KUNḌU, *Meghnādbadh kābya samālocanār dhārā*, Calcutta 1974.

²⁷⁴ Quoted *ibid.*, p. 145.

However, the modern reader would not fail to see some weak points of the Meghnādbadh. First of all, it was meant to be a heroic epic, but is essentially more a romance;²⁷⁵ Madhusūdan's main quality was lyricism rather than true epic grandeur. He was better at depicting emotionally stirring passages and arousing various moods in the reader's mind than at describing battles or unfolding actions of Homeric breadth and serenity. Nor is his diction always well-suited to an epic of this kind. But we must not forget that he was a pioneer in all these fields, that there was little in his poetry which he could have learnt from his predecessors and almost no occasion to utilize previous poetic experience and achievements.

The fact that Madhusūdan's genius lay in the realm of lyrics more than epics was evidenced by his subsequent books. *Kṛṣṇakumārī* (1861) was a drama in prose, with song insertions, the subject of which was taken from Tod's *Rajasthan Annals and Antiquities*; it has no particular merit or value. But the following two books revealed Madhusūdan's poetic talent in full. *Bīrāṅganā* (Valiant Ladies, 1862) is a collection of twenty-one epistles by various heroines of mythology and ancient epics addressed to their husbands and lovers—in verse, of course—and is remarkable as being the only book by Madhusūdan that is free from any influence of Western poetry, apart from being inspired by Ovid. Even better is the *Brajāṅganā* (Cowherd Damsel, 1861), containing eighteen poems based on the Krishna-Rādhā story and expressing the sorrows and longings of Rādhā. Needless to say that Rādhā is entirely "humanized" here and that her love is a profane love for a man, void of any *bhakti* attitude. Madhusūdan, concluding each poem by a colophon bearing the name of Madhu, created here an excellent, technically very ingenious collection of different metres.

In France, Madhusūdan wrote one only book (in 1865, published a year later) which he entitled the *Caturdaśpadī kabitābalī* (literally, Poems of Fourteen Lines). Thematically these poems are rather varied; there are subjective lyrics intermingled with reflective compositions. They are bound together by their form, a Bengali version of the sonnet, and are often considered to be Madhusūdan's best work. "As a work of art the sonnet is the best composition that Dutt produced," says, for instance, Sukumar Sen,²⁷⁶ and the book is likewise acclaimed by J. C. Ghosh.²⁷⁷ Madhusūdan was successful in proving that Modern Bengali is capable of utilizing the most varied poetic techniques and adapting even seemingly distant forms, without any artificiality and lack of naturalness. In Madhusūdan's hands, the Bengali verse attained its maturity. And though his own poems are hardly read outside schools nowadays, his merits in regard to the acceleration of the development of Bengali poetry towards modernity cannot be denied.

His other writings are mostly less successful, the *Māyākānan* (The Forest of Illusions, published posthumously) being a lyrical play and *Hekṭar-badh* (The

²⁷⁵ ALOKRAJAN DĀSGUPTA and DEBĪPRASĀD BANDYOPĀDHYĀY, BSR, p. 285.

²⁷⁶ SUKUMAR SEN, HBL, p. 222.

²⁷⁷ J. C. GHOSH, BL, p. 146.

Death of Hector, 1871) a prosaic paraphrase of a part of Homer's Iliad. More satisfactory were his two social farces and satires from 1859, *Ekei ki bale sabhya-tā?* (Is That What Is Called Civilization?), ridiculing the nouveaux riches and their "drunken stupidity,"²⁷⁸ and *Bura sālīker ghāre rom* (the title reproduced by Sen as *The Silver Rake*) aiming at old hypocrites who preach piety and virtue but are addicted to adultery. Both of them were Madhusūdan's contribution to the contemporary boom of dramas with social subjects and his avowal of the ideas of other modernists mentioned in the previous chapter.²⁷⁹

Madhusūdan was an exceptional personality, unconventional, a rebel in both his private life and his romantic poetry and a man who, with admirable sincerity, always tried to live up to his ideas and ideals. First of all, however, he was a poet, a pioneer often striking a disharmonious accord and not infrequently setting about in the wrong way, but able to open new horizons to Bengali poetry. Though not followed immediately, seldom applauded and often criticized and attacked (even Rabīndranāth Thākura, as a boy, criticized his *Meghnādbadh* in a very severe way), it was this poet who brought the long period of endless repetitions and variations to a definite end and proved the necessity of looking for new ways.

Most of his contemporaries, however, preferred to follow the example of Īśvarcandra Gupta, even though they admired Madhusūdan. One of them was Hemcandra Bandyopādhyāy (1838–1903). He was influenced by Byron, no doubt, and in his subjective attempts at self-expression, for instance in his *Cintātaraṅgini* (*Stream of Thoughts*, 1861) he avowed himself a follower of romanticism which was dominating Bengali poetry in that period. He also knew English poems well and even translated many, e.g. in his *Kabītabālī* (*Poems*, 1870), but his verse technique did not deviate from the comfortable ways frequented by the traditionalists. In his main work, the epic poem *Bṛtrasaṃhār* (*The Killing of Vṛtra*, 1875–77), he achieved something which may be considered a compromise between the traditional and the new. Like Madhusūdan, he freed his *payār* of rhyme, but retained the rhythmic structure of the old verse, thus creating poetry which was less bold and modern, but more acceptable to contemporary readers than Madhusūdan's novelties. Hemcandra was a prolific author and tried his skill in various literary fields, writing satirical poems, poetic allegories (*Ākāśkānaṇa*, *The Forest of the Sky*, 1876), epics (*Chāyāmayī*, *The Shadow-Woman*, 1880, after Dante) and free translations of Shakespeare's *Tempest* (*Nalinī-Basanta*, 1868) and *Romeo and Juliet* (1895).

More fame was won by Nabīncandra Sen (1846–1909), although his poetic talent was little more than mediocre. He was, however, able to express what had become, in the seventies and the eighties, the prevailing tendency among the Bengali intelligentsia, viz. the spirit of romantic patriotism glorifying the past

²⁷⁸ SUKUMAR SEN, HBL, p. 199.

²⁷⁹ Cf. also RABĪNDRANĀTH SĀMANTA, *Nāṭyabodh o nāṭyakār Madhusūdan*, Calcutta 1968.

splendour of India and lamenting its present-day decay and subjugation. In 1875 Nabīncandra published his once famous *Palāśīr yuddha* (The Battle of Plassey) which is characterized by this attitude, and showed the latter again in his largest work, the trilogy *Raibatak* (1886), *Kuruksetra* (1893) and *Prabhās* (1896). The hero of the trilogy is Krishna—not the god of the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* and the *Vaiṣṇava padas*, but a character of the ancient *Mahābhārata*.

As stated by Alokrañjan Dāsgupta and Debīprasād Bandyopādhyāy,²⁸⁰ “this trilogy in a way crowns the birth of the New Hinduism” which paid more attention to people than to gods. Typical, in this respect, is Nabīncandra’s line, “Above Gods is the place of Man.” This new humanism, permeating the writings of many a poet and writer of the second half of the 19th century, and finding its greatest messenger in Rabīndranāth Thākura, was a logical and inevitable conclusion drawn from the whole modernization movement and an unparalleled enrichment of Bengali literature.

On the other hand, however, the aesthetic expression of these new ideals was not yet adequate, in Nabīncandra’s poetry, and his trilogy did not succeed in reaching its aim, i.e. to become a great national epic and “the *Mahābhārata* of the 19th century.” In his time, his numerous books, e.g. three biographical poems on Christ (*Khrīṣṭa*, 1891), Buddha (*Amitābha*, 1895) and Caitanya (*Amṛtābha*, 1909), or the romance *Bhānumatī* in metrical prose (1900) were widely read and applauded, but they are nowadays little more than documents of their time.

One of the main reasons of the failure of these and other books to become great poetry was the fact that, while thrusting didactic aims into the forefront, they still lacked purely aesthetic qualities. In a way, they were mostly school-books, to be read with undeniable profit and educating the reader, but hardly able to continue their independent existence as soon as their contents were rendered out of date by later developments and a change of interest. In this respect, the first poet after Madhusūdan to reach this goal was Bihārīlāl Cakrabartī (1835–1894), a pupil of Īśvarcandra Gupta. Bihārīlāl’s poetry originated rather in the heart than in the brain. He was not ignorant of English poetry which meant such a deal to his contemporaries, but all his love and admiration belonged to the ancient Indian poetic tradition and the Bengali verse of the past. Moreover, he was a philosopher and a romanticist, accepting and expressing such progressive ideas as the social reform with inborn spontaneity, not as moralistic maxims that were to be taught. And above all, his poetic diction, while deriving directly from the great examples of the Bengali sources, was full of melody and natural fluency such as few before him had been able to achieve.

Bihārīlāl edited two journals in which his own poems appeared, reflective in contents and romantic in conception. The *Bandhubiyog* (The Death of Friends, 1863) expressed the poet’s sorrow at the death of his wife and his friends, the *Premprabāhinī* (Stream of Love, 1863) conceived poetry as a source of solace

²⁸⁰ BSR, p. 375.

and inner happiness, the *Nisarga-sandarśan* (An Excursion with Nature, 1869) answered questions on the relation of man to nature. Especially remarkable was his *Baṅgasundarī* (The Beauties of Bengal, 1870) depicting images of various types of Bengali women, and the *Śāradāmaṅgal* (1879), the traditional title of which must not mislead us; it is no glorification of a deity, but a collection of subjective lyrics reflecting on various problems of human life.

Bihārīlāl Cakrabartī represents, in the development of Bengali poetry, the first successful attempt at reaching an original synthesis of the old Indian poetic tradition and modern trends more or less imported from abroad. He strongly influenced Rabīndranāth Ṭhākur in his early writings, by the philosophical contents of his poetry as well as the melody of his verse and natural simplicity of his diction. In Bihārīlāl Cakrabartī, Bengali poetry found its greatest romantic.

Romanticism was the main source of inspiration for a large number of minor poets, among whom at least some deserve to be introduced. Īśāncandra Bandyopādhyāy (1856–1897) wrote several epic poems, but is remembered, first of all, for his *Yogeś* (1881) which is a household romance in verse. Akṣaycandra Caudhurī (1850–1898) was the author of the *Udāsinī* (The Girl Recluse, 1874), inspired by Parnell's *Hermit*. Surendranāth Majumdar (1838–1878) glorified woman in three aspects, as a mother, a sister and a wife, in his *Mahilā* (Woman, 1870), just as Debendranāth Sen (1855–1920) in his numerous poems did. Romantic love inspired Gobindacandra Dās (1855–1928), the author of the *Prem o phul* (Love and Flower, 1888), and Śibanāth Śāstrī (1847–1919), whereas the poetry of Akṣaykumār Barāl (1860–1919) was more sophisticated in character. Among the most original poets of this period, one of the older brothers of Rabīndranāth excelled, Dvijendranāth Ṭhākur (1840–1926); he was a highly intellectual personality of many-sided interest and talents, introducing various Sanskrit metres into Bengali poetry and able to versify anything, often, however, turning his verses into mere poetic playthings. Well known is his allegory, the *Svapnaprayāṇ* (The Dream Adventure, 1875), with personified emotions, qualities and phenomena, such as King Joy, Queen Compassion, Friendship, Fancy, etc. Dvijendranāth also translated the *Meghadūta* by Kālidāsa (1860) and wrote many patriotic and devotional songs.

For the first time in Bengali literature, we now meet also women-poets among the representatives of poetic romanticism, such as Kāminī Rāy (1864–1933) who excelled in patriotic poetry, her main book being the *Ālo o chāyā* (Light and Shadow, 1889), and Girīndramohinī Datta (1858–1924), the first poetess to reveal the charm of the Bengali household and the countryside.

THE MODERN NOVEL AND BAṆKIMCANDRA

In one of the preceding chapters, we were following the genesis of Bengali prose—non-existent before the 19th century—and its gradual growth, from the Fort William College textbooks and early translations, through informative articles and treatises to the first attempts at more ambitious journalistic and didactic writings. In the fifties, the language of prose and the new prosaic style reached a more satisfactory level and the possibilities of the new genre became apparent.

It was didactic and moralistic tendencies which provided the initial impetus to write the first satirical sketches as well as the first novel, *Ālāler gharer Dulāl* by Pyāricāṃd Mitra. It was a successful attempt, no doubt, containing not only an element of didacticism, to be approved by the modernists, but also that of entertainment, to be enjoyed by a wider public. About the middle of the 19th century, the number of journals and the scope of published books—or rather booklets—reached such an extent that we may talk of a market for literature. The number of printers and publishers grew rapidly and the competition started to influence the development of literature, more and more promoting books attractive to the readers, at the detriment of the hitherto prevailing didactic and educative writings.

The socially committed sketches and stories did continue to appear, but their commitment and didacticism had to find new and more attractive forms of expression. The most remarkable achievement, in this line, was the *Hutom pyāmcār nakṣā* (Sketches by a Watching Owl, 1862) by Kāliprasanna Siṃha (1840–1876),²⁸¹ one of the most active participants in the modernization movement,²⁸² the founder of the *Bidyotsāhinī sabhā* (Society for Promoting Knowledge, 1853) and the editor of a Bengali prose translation of the *Mahābhārata* (1860–68). His *Sketches Illustrative of Every Day Life and Every Day People*, as they were advertized, reveal the author's intimate knowledge of Calcutta life in its various aspects. They are vivid, witty and entertaining, offering a picture of the city seldom met with at that period. They are written in a language that successfully imitated the colloquial Bengali used in Calcutta and revealed the wide potentialities of its literary use. In popularity, the book was rivalled by Bhubancandra Mukhopādhyāy's *Haridāser guptakathā* (The Secret Tales of Haridās, 1870–73), a free adaptation of Reynold's *Mysteries of London*, one of the large and gradually growing number of books of adventure and pure entertainment which, however, mostly lacked any literary qualities.

We have already mentioned the new patriotic enthusiasm which was gaining ground, during the sixties and the seventies, and naturally found its expression in literature too. In 1867, the *Hindu Melā*, "the first national assembly of a

²⁸¹ Ibid., the year of death is given as 1870; p. 257.

²⁸² Cf. *Memoirs of Kali Prosunno Singh*, ed. by MANMATHANATH GHOSH, Calcutta 1920.

sort”²⁸³ was organized by Nandagopāl Mitra, to unify all the existing organizations and to help turning the attention of the people of Bengal towards their own nation and its history. Even more than in poetry and drama, this patriotism proved fruitful in the new prose which was used more and more often to depict certain periods of India’s history, preferably those in which the young bourgeoisie might have found a support for its feeling of national pride and self-assertion. It is only natural that hand in hand with the growing anti-British opposition and discontent with the colonial subjugation of India, the beginnings of which may be traced to this particular period, such themes were preferred which either revealed the past glory of the country or were connected with the struggle for independence of Hindu kings against the Muslim invaders of the Middle Ages. Needless to say that the historical accuracy did not matter much, in most cases, and that, in accordance with the romantic tendencies of the time, both historical events and characters were idealized and freely distorted to suit the intentions of the authors.

The first writer to discover the possibilities offered by history, in this respect, was Bhudeb Mukhopādhyāy (1825–1894)²⁸⁴ who freely elaborated two stories of J. H. Caunter’s *Romance of History*. In 1857 he wrote the *Saphal svapna* (The True Dream, based on Caunter’s *The Traveller’s Dream*) and the *Āṅguriya bini-may* (Exchange of Rings, based on *The Mahratta Chief*), publishing them, in 1862, under the common title of the *Aitihāsik upanyās* (The Historical Novel). The author was an educationist; he wrote a number of articles on Hinduism and was a good stylist and narrator. His book, however, was no “novel” but simply two stories—the term *upanyās* had not yet, at that time, acquired its present-day meaning of a real novel. The book was rather important not only as a successful piece of literature but also as the source of inspiration of the first true novel in Bengali, Baṅkimcandra’s *Durgesnandini*.

Baṅkimcandra Caṭṭopādhyāy (1838–1894)²⁸⁵ was a descendant of an orthodox Hindu family, a student of Hooghly College and one of the first M. A.s of the Calcutta University founded in 1861. He was a Deputy Collector by profession and a writer of exceptional talent. He started writing poetry and tried his skill at English prose (his *Rajmohan’s Wife* appeared in the *Indian Field* in 1864), but he soon discovered Bengali prose as the instrument which suited him best. He is the first true novelist not only of Bengal but of India in general (the title

²⁸³ SUKUMAR SEN, p. 248.

²⁸⁴ ALOKRANJAN etc., BSR, p. 247, giving the year of his birth as 1827.

²⁸⁵ SUNIL KUMAR BANERJEE, *Bankim Chandra: A Study of His Craft*, Calcutta 1968; Baṅkim-pratibhā, ed. by BIMALCANDRA SIMHA, Calcutta 1938; PRAPHULLA-KUMĀR DĀSGUPTA, *Upanyās-sāhitye Baṅkim*, Calcutta 1961; BHABATOṢ DATTA, *Cintānāyak Baṅkimcandra*, Calcutta 1961; HEMENDRAPRASĀD GHOṢ, *Baṅkimcandra*, Calcutta 1962; HARAPRASĀD MITRA, *Baṅkim-sāhitya-pāṭh*, Calcutta 1963; BRAJENDRANĀTH BANDYOPĀDHYĀY, *Baṅkimcandra Caṭṭopādhyāy*, Calcutta 1963. Cf. also ŚRĪKUMĀR BANDYOPĀDHYĀY, *Baṅgasāhitye upanyāser dhārā*, 5th ed., Calcutta 1965; APARNĀPRASĀD SENGUPTA, *Bāṅgālā aitihāsik upanyās*, Calcutta 1960; HUMAYUN KABIR, *The Bengali Novel*, Calcutta 1968.

“the father of the Indian novel” being well deserved) and his novels influenced the prose writing in his time to such an extent that this period is sometimes called *Baṅkim-yug*, i.e. the Age of Baṅkimcandra.

His fourteen novels start with the *Durgesnandini*²⁸⁶ (Daughter of the Commander of the Fortress, 1865) which draws on the Muslim period of Bengal's history for its subject, and in its composition owes much to Walter Scott; although the author refused to admit that he had read the *Ivanhoe* before writing his novel, the two books have many features in common.

Its hero is Jagatsiṃha, the son of Mānsiṃha, fighting against the Pathan chief Katlu Khān. The young soldier falls in love with Tilottamā, the daughter of an old enemy of his father, and both of them are caught by the Pathans. After several complications brought about by Ayeṣā, Katlu's daughter who is in love with Jagatsiṃha, the young hero marries Tilottamā refusing the Muslim girl.

The novel was a great success at once, its romantic tint finding an enthusiastic response among readers. It was followed, in 1866, by one of the best love romances of Baṅkimcandra, the *Kapālkuṇḍalā*.²⁸⁷ It is a love tragedy of Nabakumār and his wife Kapālkuṇḍalā, caused by an intrigue of the hero's first wife who succeeds in persuading him that Kapālkuṇḍalā was unfaithful to him; both Nabakumār and Kapālkuṇḍalā die together in the waters of the Ganges. It is a domestic tragedy indicating Baṅkimcandra's talent in depicting the Bengali home milieu and marital relations. After *Mṛṇālinī* (1869), another love romance set against an historical background, Baṅkimcandra founded the monthly *Baṅgadarśan* (The Mirror of Bengal, 1872) which soon became the most important Bengali magazine. The editor published here most of his novels as well as his numerous articles, essays and book reviews.

The first novel to appear in this journal was the *Biṣabr̥kṣa*²⁸⁸ (The Tree of Poison, 1873), a very controversial domestic tragedy of the Zamindar Nagendra and his two wives, the noble and devoted Sūryamukhī and young Kundanandinī, a widow whom the infatuated Nagendra married thus breaking the traditional ban on widow re-marriages. Sūryamukhī left her husband, not wanting to be an obstacle in his happy life with Kundanandinī, but his infatuation with the second wife soon disappeared and after he had found Sūryamukhī, Kundanandinī committed suicide. Compared to his preceding novels, especially the *Kapālkuṇḍalā*, this book is marked by what must be considered a weakness of its author—his tendency to propagating reactionary views opposing certain social reforms of Hindu society. In this case, it is his opposition to the right of the widow to remarry. As Sukumar Sen rightly observed, “here he begins to assert

²⁸⁶ In English, *Durgesh Nandini*, or, *The Chieftain's Daughter*, translated by C. C. MOOKHERJI, Calcutta 1880.

²⁸⁷ Translated by H. A. D. PHILLIPS, London 1885, and again by D. N. GHOSAL, Calcutta 1919.

²⁸⁸ Translated into English by MIRIAM S. KNIGHT, London 1884; and into Russian by VERA NOVIKOVA, Moscow 1962.

himself as a teacher of morality and does not remain satisfied as an interpreter of life."²⁸⁹

Love romances continued to attract Baṅkimcandra, and his next three books, the *Indirā* (1873),²⁹⁰ the *Yugalāṅguriya* (A Pair of Rings, 1874)²⁹¹ and the *Rādhārāṇī* (1875), were stories of happy love, as was also the novel of a blind girl, *Rajani* (1877)²⁹². They are characterized by a remarkable improvement of the author's style and progress in his narrative techniques.

His *Candraśekhara* (1875),²⁹³ though set against an historical background, and the *Kṛṣṇakānter uil*²⁹⁴ (The Will of Kṛṣṇakānta, 1878), are also social novels; the latter was considered by the author himself to be his best work. It is, however, more a novel of passion and emotions than social conflicts,²⁹⁵ with a well-depicted character of the heroine.

Baṅkimcandra's last four novels, all of them historical in subject, appeared after a short interval: *Rājsimha* (1882)²⁹⁶, narrating the defeat of Aurangzeb, *Ānandamaṭh* (The Monastery of the Ānandas, 1882)²⁹⁷ centring around the Sannyasi Rebellion in 1773, *Debī Caudhurāṇī* (1884) and *Sītārām* (1887)²⁹⁸. In spite of their historical milieus, the author himself asked his readers not to consider them, with the only exception of *Rājsimha*, to be historical novels; their leading idea was that of patriotism which was an excuse for the author to distort history, to introduce supernatural phenomena, anachronisms, and so on. However, they served their aim well. It was especially *Ānandamaṭh* which inspired the author's countrymen with patriotic enthusiasm. Here, for example, occurs the famous song *Bande mātaram* (I bow to Mother, i.e. India), to become the national anthem of India till independence. As in many of his books, Baṅkimcandra expressed his own ideas through the heroes of the novel, often showing a deep understanding of contemporary India and its needs. Thus after the defeat of the Sannyasins by the British, a divine Guru appears to explain why the rebellion had to meet this end:

"... there are two kinds of knowledge—external and internal. Internal knowledge is the main part of the Hindu religion. Internal knowledge, however, cannot be born unless external knowledge has been born. It is impossible to learn to know the spiritual unless the material has been learned. The external knowledge had been forgotten since long in this country—therefore the natural Hindu faith

²⁸⁹ SUKUMAR SEN, HBL, p. 234.

²⁹⁰ *Indira and Other Stories*, translated by J. D. ANDERSON, Calcutta 1918; in Russian, *Indira*, translated by VERA NOVIKOVA, Moscow 1963.

²⁹¹ *The Two Rings and Radharani*, translated by D. C. ROY, Calcutta 1919.

²⁹² Translated by P. MAJUMDAR, Calcutta 1928.

²⁹³ In English by M. N. RAYCHAUDHURI, Calcutta 1904, and by D. C. MULLICK, Calcutta 1905.

²⁹⁴ Translated by MIRIAM S. KNIGHT, London 1895, by D. C. ROY, Calcutta 1918, and again by J. C. GHOSH, New York 1962.

²⁹⁵ Cf. J. K. DAS GUPTA, *A Critical Study of the Life and Novels of Bankimcandra*, Calcutta 1937.

²⁹⁶ Translated into Russian by S. CIRIN, Moscow 1961.

²⁹⁷ In English by N. C. SENGUPTA, Calcutta 1906.

²⁹⁸ Translated by S. MUKHERJI, Calcutta 1903.

has disappeared too. Before the Hindu faith is renewed, it is necessary to spread the external knowledge. There is no external knowledge in this country now—there is nobody to teach it; we do not know how to teach people. Therefore the external knowledge will have to be brought in from a foreign country. It is the English who are well-informed in the external knowledge; they are apt teachers of people. Let us therefore make the Englishman our King! After the people of this country have acquired the external knowledge from Englishmen, they will be able to understand internal truth too. There will be no obstacles to the spread of the Hindu faith any more then. The natural faith will then shine again by itself. Unless this happens, unless the Hindus acquire wisdom, virtue and strength again, the rule of the English will remain intact.”²⁹⁹

Long before he wrote his last novel, Baṅkimcandra had acquired an authoritative and almost unrivalled position in the contemporary intellectual society of Bengal, and it was probably the feeling of responsibility resulting from this position which made him abandon writing novels altogether and turn towards more direct means of education and instruction. He devoted all his attention to writing articles on various subjects, philosophical treatises and religious reflections. Whereas his first contributions to this field were rather humorous or satirical, he now produced serious articles meant either to broaden the horizon of his contemporaries or to elevate their morals and religious thinking.

It must be noted, however, that his lighter essays were often more effective, ridiculing, for instance, both stupid village pundits and those Englishmen who, not understanding a bit of India, pretended to have mastered all its traditions (e.g. Rāmāyaner samālocanā, Criticism of the Rāmāyaṇa, and Kon ‘speṣiyāler’ patra, Letter by a ‘Specialist’³⁰⁰), poetic clichés and British judges, blind admirers of the British and no less blind followers of ancient traditions, etc. It was especially his Kamalākānter daptar (The Scribblings of Kamalākānta, 1875, rewritten in 1885 under the title Kamalākānta) which became very popular, containing some samples of Baṅkimcandra’s best humour.

His serious essays, articles and polemics, collected in the books Bijñānrahasya (Mysteries of Science, 1875), Sāmya (Equality, 1879) and Bibidha prabandha (Various Articles, 1887–92), show not only the deep influence of Comte and his positivistic philosophy on Baṅkimcandra, but also many interesting ideas testifying to the author’s unusual breadth of knowledge and his ability to convey it to his readers. Let us quote, as an example, a few lines from his article on Vidyāpati and Jayadeva:

“Everything is the result of rules. Also literature is the result of rules . . . Also literature is subject to innumerable rules according to the differences of the countries and their situations. All these rules are extremely complicated and hard to understand, no doubt; nobody has yet been able to analyse their whole complex. Nobody has been able to do the same in literature which Comte did in discovering the most essential facts concerning sciences. This little may be said, however, that literature is but a reflection of the situation of the country and its character. Differences in the forms of literature are correspondent to the differ-

²⁹⁹ Baṅkim racanābali, I, Calcutta, 2nd ed., 1956, p. 787.

³⁰⁰ Both were published in the Lokarahasya, The Mystery of the People, 1874.

ences in the respective countries, their political revolutions, their social revolutions and their religious revolutions, according to all those rules.”³⁰¹

The last phase of Baṅkimcandra's activities was fully devoted to religious writings.

Baṅkimcandra was a personality full of contradictions which were reflected also in the varied attitudes of his critics and admirers. Whereas the latter often literally rave about his excellence, the former, like for instance J. C. Ghosh, call him “a very mediocre novelist,” “of unintelligent and unimaginative attitude to history” who “also has serious limitations as a social novelist” and is “the typical bourgeois, smug, sentimental, didactic, and conservative;” the world “that he creates is as narrow as it is false,” etc.³⁰² Such an “evaluation” is very subjective. Nothing can of course be easier than to list the numerous faults of his novels which, however, were the first attempts of their kind in modern Indian literature. Baṅkimcandra was, indeed, “a pathfinder and a pathmaker,” as Sukumar Sen has stressed.³⁰³ His Baṅgadarśan and his novels were a school of literary education, with unprecedented attractiveness as may be concluded from what many of his contemporaries recorded.³⁰⁴ And his example, i.e. his novels with their twofold view, of the past and of the social reality of the present time, opened a new chapter in the history of Bengali literature.

He was not the only member of his family to win literary fame. His elder brother Saṅjibcandra (1834–1889) edited the monthly *Bhramar* (The Bumblebee, 1874) and wrote a couple of novels, e.g. the *Jāl Pratāpcāmd* (The False Pratāpcāmd, 1881); he excelled especially as the author of probably the first good travel-story in Bengali, the *Pālāmau* (1880–2) describing Chota-Nagpur. Baṅkimcandra's youngest brother, Pūrṇacandra (1848–1922) wrote two novels, the *Madhumatī* (1873) and the *Śaiśab sahaṇārī* (A Companion of Childhood, 1875–7).

Baṅkimcandra, as we have seen, divided his attention between historical and social novels, but the majority of his literary heirs “specialized” in one or the other genre. Thus Pratāpcandra Ghoṣ (d. 1920) wrote the bulky *Baṅgādhip parājay* (The Defeat of the King of Lower Bengal, 1869–84), with a large number of episodes and characters; Śrīścandra Majumdār (1860–1908) set his novels into the 18th-century Bengal and succeeded in creating good images of the village society of that period; Caṇḍīcaraṇ Sen (1845–1906), the translator of the *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (*Ṭam kākār kuṭīr*, 1884) imbued his historical novels (e.g. the *Mahārāj Nandakumār*, 1885, the *Jhānsīr rāṇī*, The Queen of Jhansi, 1888, etc.) with the spirit of patriotism, and Nagendranāth Gupta (1861–1940), before turning to short stories, wrote historical novels, the *Parbatbāsinī* (The Woman from the Hills, 1883) and the *Amar Siṃha* (1889). The most re-

³⁰¹ Baṅkim racanābali, II, Calcutta, 2nd ed., 1956, p. 190.

³⁰² J. C. GHOSH, BL, pp. 152–164.

³⁰³ SUKUMAR SEN, HBL, p. 237.

³⁰⁴ Cf., for instance, Rabīndranāth Ṭhākur's reminiscences in his *Chelebelā*.

markable contributions to this field, however, were the novels by Rameścandra Datta (1848–1909), signing his English writings as R. C. Dutt. He was an important personality of the period, President of the Indian National Congress and Professor of Indian History at the University of London. His four historical novels, fully deserving this denomination, form a tetralogy covering the century of the rule of Akbar, Shahjahan, Aurangzeb and Jahangir—hence their common title *Śatabarṣa* (One Hundred Years), the individual books being the *Baṅgabi-jetā* (The Conqueror of Bengal, 1874), the *Mādhavikāṅkan* (The Mādhvī Wristlet, 1877), the *Mahārāṣṭra jībanprabhāt* (Maharashtra's Dawn of Life, 1878), and the *Rājput jībansandhyā* (The Sunset of the Rajputs' Life, 1879). A true historian's acumen is perceptible also in his two social novels, the *Saṃsār* (The Family, 1886) and the *Samāj* (The Society, 1894) revealing the author's progressive views of social matters.

Social and domestic novels were the domain of Tāraknāth Gangopādhyāy (1845–1891)³⁰⁵ a medical doctor by profession who knew the Bengali countryside and its problems intimately and made the best use of this knowledge in his famous *Svarṇalatā* (1873),³⁰⁶ often referred to as the first realistic novel in Bengali. Its characters are full of life and some episodes read like fascinating short stories even nowadays. The book was a great success, having run to seven editions during the author's lifetime, and was also dramatized³⁰⁷ and staged (1888). The other novels by Tāraknāth, the *Lalita Saudāminī* (1882), the *Harīṣe biṣād* (1887) and the *Adṛṣṭa* (The Fate, 1892) were less successful.

Whereas Dāmodar Mukhopādhyāy (1853–1907) adapted foreign novels, such as the *Bride of Lammermore* by Walter Scott (*Kamalkumārī*) and Wilkie Collins' *A Woman in White* (*Śuklabasanā sundarī*), and "continued" Baṅkim-candra's *Kapālkuṇḍalā* (*Mṛṇmayī*, 1874) and the *Durgesnandinī* (*Nabāb-nandinī bā Āyeṣā*), replacing their tragic ends by happy ones, Rabīndranāth Thākur's elder sister, Svarṇakumārī Debī (1855–1932) was more original in her numerous writings. With right Sukumar Sen calls her "the first all-round and accomplished literary woman of Bengal."³⁰⁸ She was a romantic in spirit and besides poems, plays and short stories wrote a number of social and historical novels, the best-known being the *Snehalatā* (1892), from the milieu of the Calcutta middle class.

Worth mentioning are two novels by Śibanāth Śāstrī (1847–1919), the *Mejabau* (The Younger Daughter-in-Law, 1879) and the *Yugāntar* (Another Age, 1895), with good portraits of women from orthodox families. The author is, however, more remembered for his excellent monograph, *Rāmtanu Lāhīṛī o*

³⁰⁵ Born in 1843, according to ALOKRAJAN DĀSGUPTA and DEBĪPRASĀD BANDYO-PĀDHYĀY, BSR, p. 361.

³⁰⁶ In English, *The Brothers*, by EDWARD THOMPSON, 1928; in Russian by K. A. TIKHOMIROVA, Moscow 1958.

³⁰⁷ By Amṛtalāl Basu, under the title *Saralā*.

³⁰⁸ SUKUMAR SEN, HBL, p. 242.

tatkālīn Baṅgasamāj (Rāmtanu Lāhīrī and Bengali Society of His Time, 1904), "the first authentic historical scrutiny of the Renaissance of the 19th century."³⁰⁹

Satirical genres of the first half of the century found their continuation in the writings of Indranāth Bandyopādhyāy (1849–1911), the editor of the satirical journal Pañcānanda patrikā (founded in 1877) who wrote, under the pseudonym of Paṃcu Ṭhākura, satirical novels, i.e. the Kalpataru (The Wish-yielding Tree, 1874) and the Kṣudirām (1874); the latter was characterized by the author himself as "gossip." Of another kind were the satirical novels by Yogendracandra Basu (1854–1907),³¹⁰ the editor of the journal Baṅgabāsi (founded in 1881). He was a defender of old traditions and a sworn enemy of everything modern and progressive which he ridiculed in his novels, i.e. the Maḍel bhāginī (The Model Sister, 1886–8), the Cinibās caritāmṛta (The Nectar of the Life of Cinibās, 1886), the Mahārābaṇer ātmakathā (The Autobiography of Rāvaṇa the Great, 1888), and others.

The most remarkable satirist of the period was Trailokyanāth Mukhopādhyāy (1847–1919) who used an original fairy-tale form for his witty comments on the contemporary society. His Kaṅkābatī (1892), Bhūt o mānuṣ (Ghosts and Men, 1896) and especially stories of Ḍamaru (collected, in 1923, under the title of Ḍamaru carita, the Life and Deeds of Ḍamaru) combine humour with the emotionally effective atmosphere of fairy tales and reveal the author's predilection for Carroll's Alice in Wonderland.

The first Muslim novelist of distinction was Mīr Maṣārraph Hosen (1847–1912), the author of the widely-read Biṣādsindhu (The Ocean of Grief, 1885–91), retelling the Muharram legend, and the novels Udāsīn pathiker maner kathā (Thoughts of an Indifferent Traveller, 1890) and Gāḍī Miyār Bastānī (1899). A unique achievement was also his twelve-volumes autobiography Āmār jibānī (My Life, 1907–10).

³⁰⁹ ALOKRAṆJAN DĀSGUPTA and DEBĪPRASĀD BANDYOPĀDHYĀY, BSR, p. 339.

³¹⁰ Or 1905, according to ALOKRAṆJAN etc., BSR.

RABĪNDRA-YUG OR THE EPOCH OF RABĪNDRANĀTH

First Part

For more than fifty years, the Bengali literary stage was dominated by the unique personality of Rabīndranāth Thākura³¹¹ (or Tagore, as he spelled his name in English) whose all-round genius has had no rival in India, and very few in the world. Gurudeb (i.e. Divine Teacher), as he was affectionately and with admiration called by his countrymen, was a prolific poet, playwright and author of practically every prosaic genre, his Collected Works comprising two dozens of bulky volumes. He was a philosopher,³¹² reformer, educationist, orator and commentator on the political development of his country. He even occupied himself with such fields as agricultural reforms and architecture. He was one of the most successful song-composers of modern India, an actor and an accomplished painter. There was hardly any province of cultural and public life of his time in which he left no traces.

Since the very beginning of the modernization movement in Bengal, the members of the Thākura family played an important role in it. Rabīndranāth's grandfather Dvārkanāth³¹³ (usually called Prince Dvārkanāth) was a personal friend and active supporter of Rāmmohan Rāy, and the poet's father Debendranāth³¹⁴ one of the most outstanding personalities of the Brāhmoist move-

³¹¹ The monographs devoted to Rabīndranāth are too many to be enumerated here completely; in his Bibliography of Bengali Books on Rabīndranāth, appended to PRABHĀTKUMĀR MUKHOPĀDHYĀY's Rabīndra-jīvanī, Vol. 4 (Calcutta 1956), PULINBIHĀRĪ SEN listed almost 200 books; and their number grew immensely since then, especially around 1961, the year of the poet's Centenary Celebrations. Some monographs will be quoted in the succeeding footnotes. Also translations of Rabīndranāth's books, into practically all languages of the world, are very numerous and we shall have to refrain from quoting them.

Some biographies are: H. MEYER-BENFEY, Rabīndranāth Tagore (1921); E. THOMPSON, Rabīndranāth Tagore (1926; 1948); K. KRIPALANI, Rabīndranāth Tagore (1962) (with a bibliography of his works in English); G. D. KHANOLKAR, The lute and the plough. A life of Rabīndranāth Tagore. Translated by THOMAS GAY, Bombay 1963; see also M. WINTERNITZ, Rabīndranāth Tagore, Religion und Weltanschauung des Dichters (1936); MARJORIE SYKES, Rabīndranāth Tagore, London 1943 (Tagore as a man, a thinker, and a poet, written for the young student or general reader).

A useful anthology is: Collected poems and plays of Rabīndranāth Tagore, London (Macmillan) 1962.

³¹² S. CH. MITTER, La pensée de Rabīndranāth Tagore, Paris 1930; V. S. NARAVANE, Rabīndranāth Tagore, A philosophical study, Allahabad n. d.; S. RADHAKRISHNAN, The Philosophy of Rabīndranāth Tagore, London 1918.

³¹³ Cf. Memoirs of Dwarkanāth Tagore, Calcutta 1870.

³¹⁴ YOGĒSCANDRA BĀGAL, Debendranāth Thākura, Calcutta 1939; his Autobiography (Ātmajīvanī) was edited by SATĪSCANDRA CAKRABARTĪ, 3r ed., Calcutta 1927, and translated into English (The Autobiography of Maharshi Devendranāth Tagore) by SATYENDRANĀTH TAGORE and INDIRA DEVI, Calcutta 1909; London 1914.

ment and a religious philosopher. Among the thirteen brothers and sisters of Rabindranāth, we have already mentioned the poet Dvijendranāth and the novelist Svarnakumārī, but we might as well add the dramatist Jyotirindranāth (1848–1925).³¹⁵ Also among the next generation, outstanding personalities appeared, such as the writers Balendranāth (1870–1899) and Sudhindranāth (1869–1929) and the painters Gaganendranāth and Abanindranāth (1871–1951), the latter being also the author of many successful books, especially for children.

Rabindranāth Thākur (1861–1941) was born and grew up in the family house of Joṛāsāmkō in Calcutta, one of the main cultural centres of the city, in a milieu full of poetry, music and incessant discussions. He had no regular school education, but received a better preparation for his career here than any school could have offered him. It is not surprising that he started writing early and even publishing his boyish attempts in the Bhārati, the journal run by the members of the family. It was here that appeared his technically remarkable imitations of mediaeval Vaiṣṇava *padas*, Bhānusiṃha padābalī (Stanzas by Bhānusiṃha, 1877). Following the first sojourn in England, his first books of poetry came out, entitled Sandhyā-saṅgīt (Evening Songs, 1881), Prabhāt-saṅgīt (Morning Songs, 1883) and Chabi o gān (Pictures and Songs, 1883). Influenced by the subjective lyricism of Bihārīlāl Cakrabartī, they were little more than a promise. Rabindranāth himself briefly characterized them later on, in his reminiscences:

“There was nothing of the solidity of the material world in those poems. Where could I derive the strength to grasp it when, since my boyhood, I had grown up out of touch with the outside world?”³¹⁶

It was the poetic collection Kaṛi o komal (Sharps and Flats, 1887) which marked the opening of a new epoch in his literary creation, the epoch of the effort to stand as near to life as possible. The introductory poem Prāṇ (Life) is also the prologue to this new period of Thākur's literary activity:

I do not want to die in the beautiful world,
Amidst the people I want to live.
In this sunny garden of blossoms
I want to have my place in living hearts.

Besides lyrics with themes taken from nature or themes of a contemplative character, there appear here strongly erotic verses, delightful observations from the world of children, miniature sketches, reflections on social contrasts, sensitive expressions of maternal love and three patriotic poems rousing the Bengalis from their dreams, giving them confidence in their own strength and calling them to take an active part in world affairs.

The most positive new feature in Kaṛi o komal, however, is Rabindranāth's new conception of the world and its affairs, a conception primitively dialectical

³¹⁵ BASANTAKUMĀR CAṬṬOPĀDHYĀY, Jyotirindranāther jībansmṛti, Calcutta 1919.

³¹⁶ Jībansmṛti (Reminiscences of My Life), Calcutta s. d., p. 165.

and evolutionary. This element must be stressed because it is retained during the sixty years of the poet's literary activity and is never lost sight of as are so many of his conceptions and ideas; on the contrary—it develops and accompanies his whole work.

This evolutionary aspect is one of the basic and most resistant elements in the complicated and ever-changing structure of Rabīndranāth's conception of the world; later on it often helps him to overcome inner depressions and crises at moments of disappointment in the course of events in India and in the world, at moments of misunderstanding and bitterness. A firm faith in progress as the leading tendency of human history helps Rabīndranāth to see much more and in a clearer way than most of his contemporaries; and first of all it is the source of his ever young and ever reviving vital and creative energy which never leaves him to the end of his life.

From Rabīndranāth's reminiscences and from the testimony of his contemporaries we are informed of his great love for the theatre. V. Lesný says that he even "for a time hesitated whether he should not devote himself exclusively to dramatic art, as he considered this form more eloquent than any other."³¹⁷ He wrote—not counting his dramatic dialogues—almost forty plays, and was also fond of acting, especially in his own dramas. And yet Rabīndranāth never became a real dramatist in the European sense of the word. His plays are mostly either overloaded with too many lyrics and long monologues and dialogues so that they leave little room for the development of the actual plot, or they are crammed with numerous episodes weakening the dramatic effect of the main plot. Even though to some of his dramas one cannot deny some tension and real dramatic conflicts, the treatment always reveals more the poet or the philosopher; and the result is dramas which from our point of view must be looked upon as study-plays. Let us remember also that he treated many of his themes first as novels or short stories and later rewrote them as dramas without changing, in most cases, the structure of the original prosaic work in any substantial way.³¹⁸

His first three dramatic attempts belong to this period—*Prakṛtir pratiśodh* (Nature's Revenge, 1884), *Rājā o rānī* (The King and the Queen, 1889) and *Bisarjan* (Sacrifice, 1890). It is especially the latter, a theatrical transcript of the novel *Rājaraṣi* (The Saint-King, 1887) which deserves more attention for its positive and, for its time, rather bold central idea which is the fight against absurd, inhuman and demagogic religious orthodoxy. The drama has considerable defects³¹⁹—not only as regards the contents but also in the form; the free verse of the play is rather a transcript of prose into shorter lines, the characters

³¹⁷ V. LESNÝ, RTPW, p. 71.

³¹⁸ E.g. the novel *Bau-ṭhākuraṇīr hāṭ* and the dramas *Prāyaścitta* and *Paritrāṇ*, the novel *Rājaraṣi* and the drama *Bisarjjan*, the short story *Śeṣer rātri* and the play *Gṛhaprabheś*, the short story *Karmaphal* and the drama *Śodh-bodh*, the short story *Ektā āśārhe galpa* and the play *Tāser deś*.

³¹⁹ E. THOMPSON, RTPD, pp. 98–9.

of the figures are not portrayed in detail, the unity of action is disturbed by the unorganically interpolated episode of the queen's hatred towards a king's protégé, etc. But the basic anti-orthodox tendency of the play must be appreciated; the author reveals here the basest methods of the ambitious high priest who shrinks neither from a complot against the king's life nor from manipulations with the statue of the goddess whom he shows to those present with her back turned to frighten them and to stir up feelings against the sovereign. In many verses of the drama there is to be felt the deep disgust of the poet for the monstrous distortion and misuse of religion for the personal profit of one man.

Rabīndranāth's rejection of religious reaction is one of the forms of his rejection of everything which is already obsolete, which does not suit the new life and its demands and which hinders man's advance. India at that time required radical changes not only in its backward economy but also in its social organization; and naturally it was necessary to throw out the rubbish of superstitions and prejudices, decayed but obstinately maintaining themselves, artificially bolstered up by the Hindu orthodoxy.

With the problem of the conflict of the modern with the backward, the living with the dying and the dead, Rabīndranāth occupied himself in the important article *Nūtan o purātan* (The New and the Old) written in 1891.³²⁰ It is a sharp criticism of the empty shell of Hindu traditionalism and conservatism, with its demagogic phrases about the past glory of India refusing, or even forbidding, an active participation in contemporaneous life. Rabīndranāth sees the impossibility of this state of affairs continuing in India and compares it to an old, decayed town; on its old foundation it is impossible to build modern factories. The waves of life beat mercilessly and importunately on its old walls. Any attempt to defend these by pointing to the perfection of the ancestors—which, in any case, was far from being so ideal as the pundits say—would be vain; it is necessary to live, to keep pace with life:

“Remember that in the world your destruction will begin exactly when you stop. For only you will stop and nobody else. If you cannot keep pace with the world's tide, it will break over you with all its strength and you will be completely battered and bent, or be overtaken gradually by time's stream till you sink to the bottom. Go ahead without respite and live your life, or lie in repose and be damned—such is the law of the world.”³²¹

But it is not such a simple thing to keep abreast of life.

“In the present time the situation is such that we have indeed cut our tresses and nails, that we have stepped out into the world and even begun to mix with ‘the people of society,’ but we have not been able to change our way of thinking.”³²²

And this is necessary—to replace the old way of thinking and doing by the new, to roll away everything that is lying like a stone on the forward path.

³²⁰ Published in the collection *Svadeś* (The Homeland) in 1908.

³²¹ *Svadeś*, Calcutta 1944, p. 11.

³²² *Ibid.*, p. 12.

In 1890 Rabīndranāth published his poetic work from 1887–90 under the title *Mānasī* (The Heart's Desire). E. Thompson considers this collection to be the poet's first mature poetic work: "The prevailing note of the book is quiet certainty; it marks his definite attainment of maturity. He will never cease from experiment in the attempts to enlarge his own range and that of his tongue. But after *Mānasī* he is master of a sure style."³²³

Thematically the *Mānasī* links up almost directly with his previous poetry and on the whole it does not deviate from the scope of development indicated in the *Karī o komal*. It shows already that the poet lives in the centre of the problems of his time and even reacts immediately to some events happening around him.³²⁴ He pays more and more attention to social problems and dwells especially upon the sad lot of Indian women. In this respect one of the most remarkable poems of the collection is the *Nababaṅga-dampatī* (A Newly Wedded Bengali Couple) which is directed against child-marriages. It is a dialogue between an adult man and his "wife"—a little girl who cannot understand her new condition, cries for her nurse and wants to play with dolls.

And once again, still more urgently and violently, Rabīndranāth calls upon his countrymen to leave paper-patriotism and take seriously to active and effective work for their country and its welfare; and he asks the poets to turn their faces towards life because the proper place of a poet is not in solitude but "amidst the dust of life's turmoil."

On the other hand, we find in the *Mānasī* also poems of smaller artistic and ideological value. More than once there is a note out of harmony with all those duties of a poet laid down by Rabīndranāth himself, more than once he reacts to his dissatisfaction at the reality around him with a cry of desire for solitude. From his letter to his friend, Pramatha Caudhuri, dated the 29th of January 1898, we see that Rabīndranāth also realized this contradiction in himself. In this letter, written on the basis of a discussion about the *Mānasī*, he says:

"... Now it seems to me that in myself there are two contradictory and warring forces. The first calls me always to rest and complete passivity, the second does not let me rest at all. European activeness impinges ceaselessly on my calm Indian nature—hence on one side pain, on the other apathy; on one side poetry, on the other philosophy; on one side love of my country, on the other ridicule of patriotism; on one side attraction to activity, on the other to contemplation. And the result—impotence and indifference."³²⁵

Of great importance for the further development of Rabīndranāth, both the man and the poet, was his long sojourn in the Bengali countryside, from January 1891, when he took over the management of the family estates in Silaidah, on

³²³ E. THOMPSON, RTPD, p. 73.

³²⁴ So in *Sindhutarāṅga* (Seawaves) he described the tragedy of eight hundred pilgrims drowned in a storm which overtook their ship on its way to Puri in 1887; in *Dharmapracār* (The Preacher) he condemned "the holy protectors of Hinduism" who attacked a preacher of the Salvation Army and beat him to death, etc.

³²⁵ *Mānasī*, Calcutta 1946, p. 237.

the river Padma, and in Patisar, in the district of Rajsahi. Here he made the acquaintance of the village—this time no longer only as a poet sensitively perceptive of the beauties of nature, but also as a landlord taking his position and responsibilities seriously, endeavouring to grasp the situation of the village people and looking for a way to vault the deep social abyss between them and himself. Sudhīr Sen quotes Rabīndranāth's own words:

"Many years later, referring to these early experiences of village life, Tagore told us: The people 'used to come to me with their joys and sorrows, their claims and complaints. All this enabled me to form a true picture of villages. The outward appearance with rivers and wide plains, rice fields and huts nestling in the shelter of trees became familiar to me as also the inner story of rural life. The sufferings of the people became more and more intertwined with my daily work.'"³²⁶

The most immediate, and most remarkable, response of Rabīndranāth to this new experience was his short stories which he wrote from 1891 at almost regular monthly intervals—at first for the literary journal *Sādhana* whose co-editor and later chief editor he was. But he did not cease to write short stories even after 1895 when the journal was stopped, and so by 1903 his output of short stories had reached the respectable number of sixty-seven shorter or longer works.³²⁷

V. Lesný has a very high opinion of Rabīndranāth's short stories, the first true specimens of this genre ever written in Bengali: "These stories were a revolutionary event in the world of Bengali literature; apart from certain lyrical poems they are Tagore's finest works. They are an ornament to Bengali literature and will always remain a rich contribution to world literature."³²⁸

V. Lesný also comes nearest to grasping their main quality when he rightly contrasts them with Kipling's prose: "... whereas Kipling, in his Indian tales, emphasizes the unusual and remarkable, Tagore's stories depict the everyday, natural course of Indian life. The theme of the stories is usually taken from present-day family life in a town or a Bengali village, which he knew thoroughly, and at this period observed from close quarters."³²⁹

The presentation of Rabīndranāth's short stories is in most cases realistic, especially in that they often treat of the typical problems of contemporary Indian life and that they often illuminate and condemn many wants and defects in Bengali society. He consciously seeks such subjects, studies characters and situations that are typical of their milieu and pillories everything deserving condemnation.

Frequently he expresses his deep disagreement with the position of women in India, especially with the barbarian custom of child-marriage and the cruel orthodox prejudices which make of marriage a mere financial transaction or

³²⁶ SUDHIR SEN, *Rabindranath Tagore on Rural Reconstruction*. Calcutta 1943, p. 8.

³²⁷ Cf. PRAMATHANĀTH BIŚĪ, *Rabīndranāth chōṭagalpa*. Calcutta 1954, pp. 23–7.

³²⁸ V. LESNÝ, RTPW, p. 95.

³²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

a matter of social and religious prestige in which the parents have the main say without leaving any place for human feelings.³³⁰ Thus in the *Denāpāonā* (The Debt) the poet tells the story of the daughter of a poor father; she has been married into a rich family where she is always insulted and misused by her mother-in-law, because her father was not able to pay the full dowry; at last the daughter dies, tormented to death by troubles and hostile surroundings, and her mother-in-law callously sets about looking for a new bride with a big dowry for her son. The poor heroine of the story *Subhā* is married by her parents without her bridegroom being informed that she was born dumb. The *Khātā* (The Notebook) is a strong condemnation of child-marriages. In the *Śubhadṛṣṭi* (A Lucky Look) Rabīndranāth comments with irony on the Hindu custom which does not allow a man to see the face of his future wife before the wedding—a motif on which he later based the central plot of the long novel *Naukāḍubi* (The Wreck). A strong impression is left on the reader by the *Jibita o mrta* (The Living and the Dead), a story of a widow for whom there is no other way out than death, because society and its prejudices do not give her any possibility to live.

In these and many other stories, Rabīndranāth contrasts petrified, inhuman customs, superstitions and prejudices with living people, men and especially women with a rich world of feelings, describes their suffering in the conflict with their environment, and even when he lets them perish in the vain struggle or relapse into passive resignation he does so only to stress the monstrosity of the old order with its indifference to human fate. He lets them not perish everytime, however—he is also able to point the way out of this labyrinth of inhumanity, a bold and radical way, as in the *Tyāg* (Desertion): Hemanta, a Brahmin's son, is married to a casteless girl by a trick; when the truth is discovered and his father orders him to dismiss his wife, his common sense and warm feelings conquer old prejudices; he refuses to drive away the wife who is guilty of no crime and is ready to give up his own caste and home.

If we look for a unifying idea in Rabīndranāth's short stories from 1891–1903, it is perhaps best expressed by the term humanism, as far as we take it to denote the feeling of sympathy for every suffering and oppressed human being and the feeling of anger and hatred towards everything which makes man suffer. This is why so many short stories by Rabīndranāth have Indian women as their heroines—because he saw around him the sufferings of so many unhappy and tragic victims of existing prejudices and bias against their greater freedom in life and society.

Rabīndranāth was certainly much more successful in his short stories than in his early novels, the semi-historical romances *Bau-ṭhākuraṇīr hāṭ* (The Bride-Queen's Market, 1881) and *Rājaraṣi* (The Saint-King, 1887) and his first social novels *Cokher bāli* (Eyesore, 1901) and *Naukāḍubi* (The Wreck, 1903).

³³⁰ BIMANBEHARI MAJUMDAR, *Heroines of Tagore. A study in the transformation of Indian society 1875–1941*, Calcutta 1968.

Very brusquely, but not unjustly, E. Thompson classified the last two of them as "incredibly bad."³³¹ Worthy of more attention is his verse-drama *Citrāṅgadā* (1891) dealing with the proper substance of love between man and woman, with the question of the substance and function of marriage. It is based on the old episode from the *Mahābhārata* (I, 207 ff.) about the daughter of Citravāhana, the king, and the hero Arjuna. Rabīndranāth, however, took over little more than the chief figures of the original epic narrative and quite freely worked up the undogmatic story into a drama of poetic maturity and conscious tendency. In its final dialogues, he summed up his ideal of a wife which was very close to the Western democratic ideal at the time of the fight for women's emancipation. Moreover in the Bengali original the drama is written in masterly free verse, enchanting for its easy flow and euphony which are completely lacking in the poet's own prosaic and much abbreviated English translation.³³²

Rabīndranāth's crop of poetry from 1891-93 was published in the collection *Sonār tarī* (The Golden Boat, 1893) which has been much discussed by literary critics and historians. On the one hand, it no doubt suffers from the poet's intense preoccupation with himself, "the writer's obsession with his own destiny,"³³³ on the other, however, it contains a number of beautiful emotional pictures and love songs in which Rabīndranāth struck the note which he was to sing, later on, in his best poetry and which, perhaps more than any other, made him the true national poet of Bengal; it is his songs, full of exquisite beauty and word music, delightful in simple poetic style and masterly choice of images. They are not yet many, in this book, however. For other poems, reflective in contents, Rabīndranāth no less fortunately chose longer and metrically more free verse, not obstructing the poet in the process of expanding his ideas. In these poems his poetic comparisons tend towards parables and his metaphors towards symbolism, sometimes making the contents more difficult to understand.

Rabīndranāth's preoccupation with himself is inseparably linked with a feeling of loneliness which drives the poet to seek conversation with nature rather than with human beings. This feeling remains with him in the succeeding period and provides the main impulse to the rise of the conception of *ĵībandebatā*, the personal deity, in his next collection *Citrā* (The Medley, 1895). Within the framework of the development of the poet's religious thought, however, this conception was but a short-lived episode, to be soon "lost in his strong religious experience and absorbed into his general system of thought."³³⁴

In 1896, his *Caitālī* (Late Harvest) appeared, a collection of seventy-nine poems, mostly of fourteen lines; we mention these numbers because they speak for Rabīndranāth's wonderful poetic fertility, for the composition of the first and the last poem of the book are separated by little more than four months.

³³¹ E. THOMPSON, RTPD, p. 202.

³³² *Chitra*, 1914.

³³³ E. THOMPSON, RTPD, p. 111.

³³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 111.

The quatrain *Tattvajñānhīn* (Unphilosophical) may be considered to be the motto of the whole collection:

Let anybody who likes it with closed eyes
Meditate whether our world is real or an illusion.
I prefer with thirsty eyes in day's light
To look round me at the world.

And the poet was looking attentively at the world from his house-boat on the river where most of these poems were written. He observed the beauties of nature as well as the simple inhabitants of the country and thought of their lot. He draws a realistic picture, full of love, of a Hindustani labourer's daughter who has to take care of the household and her little brother; he describes a boy with a bullock and a girl with a puppy; he reflects, at the sight of a simple peasant passing unnoticed, what an interest the world would take in him if he suddenly appeared there some centuries later. All these pictures which introduce the country people into modern Bengali poetry are imbued with the warmth of the poet's sympathy and his deep humanism. One can literally see how man who stands in Rabīndranāth's first poems somewhere on the far horizon comes step by step into the centre of his interest and his creative conceptions.

After 1897 the quiet development of the poet and his work during his sojourn in the countryside was disturbed, to a certain degree, by the political events of that time and the changed political atmosphere, marked by a growing tension between the British and the Indian nationalist movement. We find their echo in nearly all Rabīndranāth's subsequent collections, beginning with the *Kalpanā* (The Dreams) which contains poems from 1897-99.

Patriotic poetry was no novelty in Rabīndranāth's work. In the *Kalpanā*, however, a new, anti-British note is to be heard. His previous poems of this genre had rather a didactic, educative tendency; their aim was the human improvement of the members of the Bengali nation and the raising of their self-reliance and national pride. Now Rabīndranāth went farther; although here, too, he considered it his national and poetic duty to criticize the weaknesses and shortcomings of the Bengalis, he attacked first of all servility towards the British, blind imitation of their way of life and attempts to curry favour and gain honours. He looked upon such behaviour as a manifestation of unworthy self-humiliation, especially because he was no longer willing to accept the imperious attitude on the British part and servile subservience and devotedness on the other part. And so he apostrophed his country in the concluding lines of the poem *Bhikṣāyāṃ naiva naiva ca* (Never to beg!):

He who doesn't honour you, who looks down on you, Mother,
Cannot honour me!

Patriotic poems constitute, however, only a part of the *Kalpanā*. Otherwise the collection develops and deepens the tones heard in Rabīndranāth's previous books of poetry, especially religious reflections and songs of love. Some of the latter the poet translated into English in the book entitled *The Gardener*

(published for the first time in 1914) which became so popular in the Western world. But this English version can hardly be called a translation; it reproduces the thought-content of the poems, but in the form of free prose lacking completely the beauty of expression, rhythm and euphony of the original; Thompson rightly observed that "not one of his books has been more travestied in 'translation.'" ³³⁵

One of the most positive qualities of Rabindranāth's poetic creation at the end of the 19th and especially in the first years of the 20th century is a living optimism, an ability to delight even in the most simple gifts of life, to perceive the beauties of the world and to interpret them to his readers. In one of his witty epigrams a whole collection of which he published in 1899 under the title *Kaṇikā* (Trifles) he declared:

When you shed tears over sunset in the night,
The sun will not return—you only lose the stars.

And in his next work *Kṣaṇikā* (Flying), published in 1900, he gave clear proof that he was far from "shedding tears over sunset."

The *Kṣaṇikā* is an excellent collection of poems of considerable maturity reflecting the poet's love of life and men—in this respect one of Rabindranāth's best books. In it he praises the beauties of nature, sings his happiness and sorrows of love, paints in vivid colours pictures of women at the *ghāt*, of playing children and the noisy market where he notices a sad girl without a single penny to spend. And out of all these beauties and living impressions there arises in him a feeling of joyful happiness at the fact that he is alive and taking part in life together with other people. He does not envy Kālidāsa his glory because

"my heart dances in me suddenly / when I think of this wonder— / Kālidāsa has been dead for a long time / and me—I am living."

It was not only the logical conclusion drawn from a consistent assertion of the claim that poets should write "like simple people speak—in simple prose," ³³⁶ but also a bold novelty in Bengali literature that Rabindranāth should use in this period colloquial Bengali, the so-called *calit bhāṣā*, in his poems. E. Thompson quotes the poet's words:

"In *Kṣaṇikā*, I first found my language . . . I first realised the beauty and music of colloquial speech. That gave me an extraordinary sense of joy and power . . ." ³³⁷

The introduction of the colloquial language into poetry was not Rabindranāth's only service to his mother tongue. He always took a great interest in the theory of language; after 1891 he wrote a number of articles on Bengali which were then published under the title *Śabdatattva* (The Theory of the Word)

³³⁵ Ibid., p. 160.

³³⁶ *Kṣaṇikā*, Calcutta 1945, p. 87.

³³⁷ THOMPSON, RTPD, p. 182.

and which contained "some fundamental discoveries in the phonology of the modern Bengali language."³³⁸ Also another fact must be mentioned in this connection: Rabīndranāth was the first to introduce a native Indian language as an official language into Congress, all of whose meetings had been conducted exclusively in English up to 1905. In this year, at the session of the Bengali branch of Congress, Rabīndranāth delivered his Presidential Address in Bengali.

Patriotism, which was coming to occupy an increasingly important place in his literary creation, was also the main inspiration of his epic collection *Kathā* (Stories) published in 1900 and, later on, along with some of Rabīndranāth's older epic poems under the title *Kathā o kāhinī* (Stories and Narratives). In the *Kathā* Rabīndranāth re-elaborated older Indian subjects, viz. Buddhist legends, Marathi and Rajasthani ballads and Vishnuist narratives; the book was characterized by a Bengali critic as "a text-book of nationalism for so many of us in our youth."³³⁹

In a still deeper way he expressed his nationalist feelings in the lyrical collection *Naibedya* (Sacrifice) from 1901. In these hundred poems, we can see that Rabīndranāth's effort to achieve a synthesis of religious faith with the desire to take an active share in life, of his faith in God and love for people and his country is accomplished. V. Lesný called the reflection of this process in the poet's creation the spiritualization of his poetry;³⁴⁰ we would prefer in this case to stress more the approach of the religious conception to life. For Rabīndranāth had written much spiritual poetry before the *Naibedya*, but here he systematically brings it into relation with reality. His God is no longer an unattainable being high above the clouds or a personal *jībandebatā*; he resides

"in every sorrow, in every happiness, in every house, / in all minds, in all hearts,
in every effort."

He reveals to the poet that he was able to come into his soul only because its doors had been opened to the whole world:

If you had shut the door, if you had called to me from behind it,
How could I have reached the inside of your soul?

The poet is resolved to fight for his God against all the bigots who

"despise humanity / and are only pretending to act as your intercessors," who
"have botched the work by senseless rules / and beaten reason to death in the
prison of the *śāstras*."

His faith gives him courage to live without fear of death and to struggle for truth and justice—first and foremost in his own country.

³³⁸ SUKUMAR SEN, HBL, p. 317.

³³⁹ SUBRATA BANDYOPĀDHYĀY, *Gaṇatantrir kabi Rabīndranāth. Paricay* 1950, pp. 56-7.

³⁴⁰ V. LESNÝ, RTPW, p. 115.

"You are, my Master, in this shamed country," says the poet and rises to its defence against all who "without shame / would like to drown right in a flood of power in an immense injustice, / in the name of love for their nation."

He does not include only India—with anxiety he observes the growing aggressiveness of imperialism at the turn of the century all over the world, and again and again he condemns in hot words its greediness which is sharpening its weapons to bathe the world in blood.

The rest of Rabindranāth's poetic creation up to 1905 did not reach the level and significance of the Naibedya. There appeared in 1903 the *Utsarga* (Dedications), a collection of poetic prologues to the single volumes for a new collective edition; the book *Smaran* (Memories, 1903), poetic reminiscences dedicated to the memory of the poet's wife, who died towards the end of 1902; the *Śiśu* (The Child, 1903), mostly based on charming childish ideas and developing the conceptions of the lively fancy of a child; and the *Kheyā* (Crossing, 1906) in which the loss of not only his wife, but also his daughter *Reṇukā* and his father *Debendranāth* was reflected; the colour of the poetry is more melancholic, the poems lack the vital optimism and sense of reality which distinguished, for instance, the *Naibedya*.

In October 1905, the British carried out the division of Bengal into a western Hindu and an eastern Muslim part, in order to smash the united nationalist movement at its focal centre. This act was immediately followed by a real storm of resistance throughout Bengal. Its first expressions were inseparably connected with the name of Rabindranāth. It was he who gave the impulse to observe the 16th of October, the day of the division, as a national Day of Hindu-Muslim Unity. He stood directly at the head of the nationalist movement in Calcutta, organized meetings and demonstrations and, in the very centre of the turmoil of political struggle, he composed his nationalist songs appealing to his compatriots for the unity of the whole nation and active resistance to the British rule. One of the most frequent motifs of this poetry, continuing and deepening in this way his previous lyrics, was the stress on courage—courage to live, to go ahead and to fight against injustice in every form. Again and again Rabindranāth emphasized the moral superiority of the oppressed over the oppressors and on it he based his firm belief in the future and an unshakable certainty in the victorious outcome of the fight:

Do never lose courage, the Master is watching over us—
The more they will crush the right, the more their flag will fall into dust,
Their flag will fall into dust.

With enthusiasm Rabindranāth took part also in the realization of another main point of Congress's new programme, viz. national education. He was no beginner in this respect; he had already paid much attention to both the theoretic and practical problems of education. In 1901, he founded in Santiniketan a school—an *āśram*, as he called it—where he tried to blend the old traditions of Indian education with the achievements of modern Western

science. He encouraged independent thinking in children, trained their skill by means of games and easy manual work and brought them up to love nature, their country and God. The school of Santiniketan, where even co-education was introduced later on, was at the time in India a remarkable and pioneering school, the more so as, in Santiniketan Rabīndranāth practically abolished all restrictions and barriers of caste. In the first decade of our century, he dwelt also very much upon theoretic questions of education; he wrote articles on the problems connected with it and on its spread and propagated his ideas in the Bengali Association of National Education (Jātiya śikṣā pariṣad), which owed a great debt to him.³⁴¹

Rabīndranāth, however, was even at those times when he took an active part in the nationalist movement, also its critic—a critic of its shortcomings and especially of its neglect of the social problems of India, which in his opinion had always to take precedence of national questions. He developed his ideas in his Presidential Address when Congress was in session at Patna in 1907; he developed them once more and still more cogently in his important article *Sadupāy* (The Right Method, 1908).³⁴² As the main task he laid down closer contact of the nationalists with the people through systematic work for the people.

The mere fact that Rabīndranāth, at a time when the Indian nationalist movement was still dissociated from the masses, directed attention to social problems and called for their solution was a proof of his progressive position in the nationalist camp. And in his literary creation he showed that in other respects, too, he was in advance of most of his contemporaries. In *Gorā*, perhaps his best novel, which he published from 1907 as a serial in the magazine *Prabāsi* and, in 1910, as a book, he dealt with the present religious life of India, with modern Hinduism and its problems.

The hero of the novel is Gaurmohan, nicknamed *Gorā* ("White"); he is a son of Irish parents; his father was killed in the Sepoy Mutiny and his mother died at his birth. *Ānandamayī*, the wife of *Kṛṣṇadayāl*, took charge of *Gorā* and brought him up as her own child. She hid his origin from him and *Gorā* became an ardent Hindu, a model of orthodoxy. He leads a group of young men who aim at purifying the old Hindu faith. His best friend, *Binay*, is also one of them till he is led to forsake this path by his love for *Lalitā*, the daughter of *Pareś*, a member of the *Brāhmasamāj*. This religious group, whose goal is a modern Hinduism without any orthodox prejudices and survivals, stands in implacable opposition to the adherents of the old faith; *Binay*, who would like to marry *Lalitā*, finds himself between two hostile camps. He breaks with the orthodox Hindus and with *Gorā*, but he is not accepted into the *Brāhmasamāj* from which *Pareś*, too noble and tolerant for any sect, is driven out. On the other hand *Sucaritā*, the foster-daughter of *Pareś*, is won for *Gorā*'s faith through her love for him. However,

³⁴¹ Rabīndranath Tagore. Pioneer in education. Essays and exchanges between Rabīndranath Tagore and L. K. ELMHIRST, London 1961; H. B. MUKHERJEE, Education for fulness. A study of the educational thought and experiment of R. Tagore (1962); R. S. MANI, Educational ideas and ideals of Gandhi and Tagore (1964); K. GOPAL, Social thought of R. Tagore, Meerut 1974.

³⁴² Published in the collection *Samūha*. Calcutta 1928, pp. 110–123.

Gorā does not remain the leader of orthodox youth; his experiences in the country where he sees clearly the untenability of Hindu caste barriers and regulations lead him step by step to a freer faith not hidebound by sectarianism. When Kṛṣṇadayāl, on his death-bed, at last reveals to him the secret of his origin, Gorā welcomes this as a liberation from the chains with which he felt himself bound.

This is the central plot of the novel which is supplemented with a number of episodes and often interwoven with over-long discussions on religious questions. The way in which the conflict between orthodox Hinduism and Brāhmoism was solved in Gorā throws light on Rabīndranāth's conception of religious problems in modern Hindu India. He rejected orthodoxy because of its narrow-minded anxiety to preserve religious precepts creating a real caste-barrier between the members of higher and lower classes; he rejected, however, also the Brāhmasamājists because of their neglect of the people and their sectarianism. He looked for a new way—for a free, humane and humanistic religion, no church or sect, but faith in God which would not put obstacles in the way of positive, democratic relations between people of all castes, classes and religions.

Therefore the most positive personage of the novel from the beginning to the end is Ānandamayī, the mother—a “free-thinker” condemned by both sides; her purely motherly humanism does not allow her to ignore anybody only because he was born a member of a lower caste. Even Pareś—though certainly a noble man—cannot win the affection of the reader to the same extent as the firm Ānandamayī because of his weak and mild character. In her Rabīndranāth painted his ideal of a modern Indian wife. Her opposites are Hārāṇ, the leader of the Brāhmasamāj, and Abināś, the bigoted admirer of Gorā, both of them portrayed with such convincing realism that they must repel the reader by their idiocy and narrow sectarian bias. It is no coincidence that in them Rabīndranāth introduced representatives of both the hostile Hindu camps; it only reveals his internal disagreement with both sides. And let us not forget that Rabīndranāth was Secretary of the Brāhmasamāj till 1911; the novel Gorā is an embodiment of the ideas for which he dissociated himself from this religious body.

Once again, Rabīndranāth returned to the religious problems of India and the social evils maintained and veiled by them, in his next work, the drama *Acalāyatan* (Unmovable, 1911).

The scene of this play is the town Acalāyatan; it is a stronghold of theocracy in which an Indian reader can easily recognize a caricature of orthodox Hinduism. Its leaders have surrounded their town with hermetically sealed walls, enclosed within them their followers Sthabiraks as well as the untouchable Darbhaks, thus preventing any communication with the “pagan” Śoṇapāṃśus, the working peasants and craftsmen who live outside the walls of the town. The priests control the town by means of religious rules, prohibitions and restrictions codified in sacred scriptures that are known to nobody else. They punish severely the smallest infringement and condemn the boy Subhadra who dared, in spite of a strict prohibition, to open a window in Acalāyatan and let in the “dangerous” fresh air, to a cruel penance which is practically equivalent to a death sentence. This is the

last drop making the full cup of inhumanity overflow. The good Guru who left the town many years ago, leads the *Ṣoṇapāṃśus* and orders them to destroy the walls and to build up a new and better town on the ruins.

There is no doubt that in this symbolic play the walls of *Acalāyatan* are a building of religious narrow-mindedness and thralldom which has to be destroyed so that in its place a new structure can be erected—a religion free, living, not hindering the growth of man and his personality, offering protection and support neither to bad individuals—a violent king or an inhuman priest—nor to a system of terror and peril of life.

Rabīndranāth wrote his drama almost at the same time as the poetry of one of his most famous collections, the *Gitāñjali*, which was published in 1910. We are speaking, of course, about the original Bengali collection of this name because the English book of Rabīndranāth's spiritual poetry published under the title of *Gitanjali* is not identical with the Bengali *Gitāñjali*.

The latter is a collection of predominantly spiritual poetry and represents, in this respect, the culmination of Rabīndranāth's religious creation both in subject and form. Thematically it links up directly with the *Naibedya* and formulates the poet's clearly crystallized conception of life permeated by the ubiquitous presence of God which does not want to lead man away from reality or enable him to throw off responsibility for his worldly life and the fate of his fellows. As to the form, the poet knows how to make the most of the song-structure which, in this period of his creation, pushed all other poetic forms into the background. And it must be said that Rabīndranāth chose this form very fortunately—he could hardly have found a more suitable expression for his spiritual lyrics, in most cases not meditative or even apologetic, but purely sensitive and highly emotional.

We shall not dwell at length on other books written by Rabīndranāth in that period—the drama *Śāradotsab* (The Autumn Festival, 1908), singing the praises of nature and its freedom, the *Prāyaścitta* (The Penance, 1909), a dramatization of his first semi-historical novel, and the symbolic plays *Rājā* (The King, 1910) and *Ḍākghar* (The Post-Office, 1912); none of them occupies an important place in his writings.

In 1912–13 Rabīndranāth translated, with considerable freedom, specimens of his poetry into English. He compiled a small anthology of his spiritual lyrics (mainly from the books *Naibedya*, *Kheyā* and *Gitāñjali*) which was published in London in 1913 under the title "*Gitanjali. Song Offerings*" and met with an immediate and tremendous response both in Europe and in America. At the same time the poet made a trip to the United States and Europe and lectured on his religio-philosophical ideas to Western audiences. Thus it was that the West became acquainted with Rabīndranāth as a thinker and a poet of spiritual lyrics without having information on his most valuable literary work, without knowing anything about the really positive and progressive trends of his creation, his fight against the social and cultural backwardness of the Bengali society, his patriotic enthusiasm and resistance to the British colonial rule in

India. This circumstance made it impossible for the world to form a proper judgement of Rabindranāth's work because it was and still is mainly dependent on English versions of his works as almost the only source of acquaintance with his creative production. And Rabindranāth, in truth, at first even confirmed this "public opinion" by translating into English especially works of a type similar to those contained in the English Gitanjali—because he saw what an enthusiastic welcome it met with in West.³⁴³ It was, indeed, especially for this collection that, in November 1913, he was awarded the Nobel Prize as the first member of an Asiatic nation—the highest acknowledgement a writer was then able to get—and became at once a poet of world fame.

Before proceeding to describe Rabindranāth's writings, in what appears to be the second phase of his literary career, let us survey in short the most important works contributed, in the same period, by his contemporaries. They were conspicuously few, both in prose and poetry; it was only in the dramatic genre that other authors were able to occupy a place more important than Rabindranāth.

Musical plays, historical and semi-historical pieces imbued with the feeling of patriotism, romances, farces and domestic plays continued to attract the audiences as well as the attention of playwrights, among whom Girīścandra Ghoṣ (1844–1911)³⁴⁴ excelled and for a relatively long time was setting the tune. He was a true theater-man, a good actor and an experienced producer, connected with many professional stages in Calcutta. As a prolific writer, "equally adept in drawing tears and laughter,"³⁴⁵ he left practically no dramatic form untried; he even dramatized Baṅkimcandra's novels, Madhusūdan's Meghnādbadh and Nabīncandra's Palāśīr yuddha. Among his original contributions, mythological plays with songs, such as the Rābaṇbadh (The Killing of Rāvaṇa, 1881), the Sītāharaṇ (1882) and many others, won the heart of the audiences both by their traditional subjects and their unambitious form. He wrote even stage-biographies of great personalities of Indian religious history (e.g. Buddhadeb-carita, 1887) and paid his tribute to the movement for social reforms in plays on contemporary themes—Praphulla (1889), Balidān (The Sacrifice, 1905), Śāsti ki sānti (Punishment or Peace, 1908) etc. In his later plays, patriotism prevailed, in accord with the growth of the nationalist movement.

Humour and satire were the main tone in numerous plays by Amṛtalāl Basu (1853–1929)³⁴⁶ who turned Molière's Harpagon into a Bengali miser, in his Kṛpaṇer dhan (The Miser's Wealth, 1900). Among his plays, also mythological and romantic dramas appeared (e.g. Hīrakeūrṇa, The Diamond Dust, 1875), but it was his social farces and satires which were responsible for his great popularity. In many of them, however, social conservatism and narrow middle-

³⁴³ J. C. GHOSH, BL, pp. 169–70.

³⁴⁴ Selections from the Writings of Girish Chunder Ghose, ed. by MANMATHANATH GHOSH, Calcutta 1912.

³⁴⁵ J. C. GHOSH, BL, p. 151.

³⁴⁶ ARUNKUMĀR MITRA, Amṛtalāl Basu jībanī o sāhitya, Calcutta.

class bias against novelties and reforms found expression, as in the *Bibāha bibhrāt* (Marriage Confusion, 1884), the *Sammati samkaṭ* (The Dilemma, 1891), the *Tājjabbyāpār* (A Marvellous Affair, 1891) or the *Kālāpāni* (The Ocean, 1893). In this respect, his later farces, e.g. the *Ādarśa bandhu* (The Ideal Friend, 1900) or the *Nabayauban* (The Early Youth, 1914) were much better.

An interesting personality was Dvijendralāl Rāy (1863–1913) who studied in England and was a Government official. His earlier plays, such as the *Sītā* (1902), were written in verse; later he discovered the larger potentialities of prose dialogues interspersed with songs. His favourite subjects were those culled from history which he knew how to inspire with patriotism; needless to say that historical truth did not matter much in these plays, among which the *Sāhājān* (Shahjahan, 1910), the *Candragupta* (1911) and the *Simhal bijay* (The Ceylonese Victory, 1915) deserve mention. In general, however, Dvijendralāl's dramas lagged far behind his good intentions and artistic ambitions.

His contemporary Kṣīrodprasād Bidyābinod (1863–1927), professor of chemistry at a College in Calcutta, excelled in dramatic fairy tales and mythological plays, most frequently richly decorated with songs. His *Ālibābā* (1897), an elaboration of one of the tales of the Arabian Nights, was a great stage success. Kṣīrodprasād skilfully continued the tradition of the old *yātrā* plays, with an almost unmistakable sense for what the audiences liked and preferred. He wrote also a few pseudo-historical plays, like the patriotic *Baṅger Pratāpāditya* (1903), but was better in traditional subjects (e.g. *Raghubīr*, 1903).

As said before, very few poets and prose writers appeared at the turn of the century in Bengal and only one of them was able to match Rabīndranāth's writings. It was Prabhātkumār Mukhopādhyāy (1873–1932), a barrister by profession and a born narrator, certainly better in his short stories^{346a} than his novels. He was an attentive observer of life and had a rare sense of humour. His short stories appeared in magazines as well as in collections, starting with the *Nabakathā* (New Tales, 1900) and ending with the *Jāmātā bābājī* (The Beloved Son-in-Law, 1931). As stated by Sukumar Sen, they "reveal a spirit of bonhomie and a love for life that is always worth living, in spite of trials and sorrows, failures and breakdowns."^{346b} Even though lacking in the thematic significance and the emotional involvement of Rabīndranāth's stories, they were an original enrichment of the genre in Bengali literature.

^{346a} In English, *Stories of Bengali Life*, by MIRIAM S. KNIGHT and the author, Calcutta 1912.

^{346b} SUKUMAR SEN, HBL, p. 328.

RABĪNDRA-YUG OR THE EPOCH OF RABĪNDRANĀTH

Second Part

Rabīndranāth Thākur, after being awarded the Nobel Prize, returned to Santiniketan, where his countrymen had prepared for him a festive welcome. His reply to the address of congratulation was, however, an unpleasant surprise for all Bengalis. The poet asked the crowd:

“What brings you, gentlemen, here to-day ? You, whom I had failed to please so long, what have I done, pray, now to please you so mightily ? It is not my worth, but the recognition of the foreigner, that has evidently worked up this sudden outburst of appreciation. I thank you for your generosity ; but excuse me please, if I refuse to get drunk with you over this gilded cup of foreign wine.”³⁴⁷

We mention this event because it gives more than a hint of the feelings with which Rabīndranāth accepted the Nobel Prize. He was certainly exaggerating in describing the attitude of India to his person and his work as hostile;³⁴⁸ but nobody can deny that in his own country, though towering high above the other poets and writers of the day, he did meet with a great deal of negative criticism, misunderstanding of his reformatory efforts and a reserved reception of his work. And now, all at once, he was cordially accepted both in Europe and in America and awarded the highest honours—after the Nobel Prize, in 1915, he was made a baronet—and the first English editions of his writings were hailed with admiration. Rabīndranāth undoubtedly was “successful” in choosing for Western society those of his works for which it was peculiarly receptive in the gloomy and strained atmosphere preceding the first Great War—especially his spiritual poetry, providing in God and religion an escape from hopeless prospects and a seemingly desperate situation, in a world over which the clouds of a terrible catastrophe were already gathering. “The fact that Europe, even before the last war, was in search of a ‘new’ religion, and that, therefore, Rabindranath’s arrival there took place at the right psychological moment, is obvious from many statements made at that time by leading Western writers,” says A. Aronson.³⁴⁹ And it was into such a preconditioned atmosphere that the English *Gitanjali* made its entry to fill a “gap” in Western literature, in place of whose scepticism or decadency it offered the novelty of a tone of devotedness to God and boundless trust in him. Moreover, with its

³⁴⁷ The Calcutta Municipal Gazette. Tagore Memorial Special Supplement, September 13, 1941, p. XXI. The poet’s speech along with all the circumstances is given, in more detail, in PRABHĀTKUMĀR MUKHOPĀDHYĀY’s *RJRP* 2, pp. 336–7.

³⁴⁸ PRABHĀTKUMĀR MUKHOPĀDHYĀY, *RJRP* II, p. 336, writes that the preparations for a festive welcome of the poet in Calcutta had been made before he was awarded the Nobel Prize and adds: “The rumour which arose that the poet’s countrymen did not proceed to give him a cordial reception until he won the respect of the foreigner, is thus an unjust condemnation of the people of the country.” Cf. also E. THOMPSON, *RTPD*, pp. 220–1.

³⁴⁹ A. ARONSON, *Rabindranath Through Western Eyes*. Allahabad 1943, p. 81.

more human and worldly conception of God, it introduced new religious conceptions into the West just at a time when there was a considerable turning away from Catholicism, especially among the intellectuals.

In these circumstances, it is no wonder that, in the West, Rabīndranāth's name became, in the first years of his world fame, practically a synonym for a religious, or even mystic poet and thinker. As stated by Ajitkumār Cakrabartī: "In most of the reviews of the English *Gitanjali* which I read in European papers, they tried to show the close resemblance of Rabīndranāth's poetry with the mystic literature to present him as a mystic poet."³⁵⁰ Rabīndranāth himself, however, is mainly to blame for this; he himself translated most of his works into English. In this respect he at first complied rather too willingly with the contemporary taste and wishes of the West and did not translate those of his books which would shake the political self-confidence of the bourgeoisie or upset its false social "balance."

This conformation to bourgeois demands was not Rabīndranāth's only reaction to the welcome given to his works in the West. Even in his Bengali output from 1913-14, the poet's inclination to continue the spiritual lyrics which were so successful is clearly observable. It is sufficient to mention the collections *Gītimālya* (A Garland of Songs) and *Gītālī* (Songs), elaborating again and again the same religious motives in the form of songs. There is no doubt that, from the point of view of form, the *Gītimālya* especially must be acknowledged as one of the peaks of Rabīndranāth's creation; E. Thompson even expressed the opinion that it is "perhaps his greatest book of songs;"³⁵¹ but if, in forming a judgement, we also consider the subject-matter and ideology of this poetry, we cannot agree with this high evaluation.

It was a good thing that neither Rabīndranāth's enthusiasm for spiritual lyrics nor certain *l'art-pour-l'art* tendencies, formulated for instance in his play *Phālgunī* (1915), a poetic celebration of Spring, could keep him from artistic creation of a higher and more positive type. His novel *Caturaṅga* as well as his next two poetic collections *Balākā* and *Palātakā* showed the poet's return to life and reality.

The novel *Caturaṅga* (Four Parts, 1914) is, in its ideology, linked very closely with the better known novel *Gorā*; once again it presents Rabīndranāth as a critic of the religious life of contemporary India, striving after some higher type of faith. In this respect, it is perhaps Rabīndranāth's most typical prose work.

The story of Jagamohan, a highly educated atheist and humanist of the modern type, his nephew Śacīś and the latter's friend Śrībilās who is also the narrator of the novel, is both important and daring in subject. It presents a conflict between practical and active atheism and two forms of Hinduism, orthodox and exalted Vishnuism. The book does not—and since it is Rabīn-

³⁵⁰ *Kābyaparīkramā*. Calcutta 1944, p. 112.

³⁵¹ E. THOMPSON, RTPD, p. 223.

dranāth's it cannot—end in the victory of atheism over religion, but it aims at stressing the positive elements of practical and humanistic atheism in order to achieve a kind of synthesis of this disbelief with a religious conception of the world.

The first poem of the collection *Balākā* (The Swan, 1916), generally called *Sabujer abhiyān* (The March of Green), creates for the reader the atmosphere of the whole book, an atmosphere imbued with optimism, splendour and delight. It was originally written as a poetic introduction to the *Sabujpatra* (Green Leaves), a new magazine which set forth as its aim "to emphasize the characteristic Indian values and their realism and to satirize sterile conventionality, empty snobbery and hazy romanticism,"³⁵² to attack orthodox survivals, and to root out old and lifeless conventions. Its editor Pramatha Caudhuri wrote in the editorial of its first number: "It is within our power to try our utmost best and keep the Bengali mind awake. The ability to shake man is in everybody's hands."³⁵³ Therefore the *Sabujpatra*, whose main contributor was Rabindranāth, chose green, the colour of spring and youth, for its symbol and, for the same reason, the poet in his prologue addressed youth as the instrument of ceaseless change, as the destroyer of old orders and an ardent fighter for a new and better life. "It is impossible for me to neglect the march of youth and the summons of life," thus Kṣitimohan Sen reported that he had said.³⁵⁴

In this poem which determined the basic tone of the journal *Sabujpatra* and of the collection *Balākā*, Rabindranāth showed that he wanted to go forward with the youthful forces of the society of his time, that he was not willing to become the defender of torpid and backward ideas and their expressions. He formulated here the principle and generally valid idea of going along with the developing forces of human society, with those of its elements that are not lagging behind its development, but marching at its head. Here we meet again that typical Tagorean view of development which has already been mentioned and characterized as one of the most constant elements of the poet's conception of the world.

Neither can we miss the remarkably mature form of these poems, its bold novelty, exquisite beauty and perfect harmony with the ideas expressed.

Quite different from the lyric *Balākā*, but no less valuable in its contents, is Rabindranāth's next collection of fifteen poems entitled *Palātākā* (Fugitive, 1918), including a number of social ballads. The central subject of nearly the whole book is the Indian woman and her sufferings in Indian society, and its basic tone the feeling of deep compassion with these victims and anger at those who let them suffer.

Thematically closely connected with these poems are some of Rabindranāth's short stories written in this period, directed especially against the Hindu custom of arranging young people's marriages without consulting their feelings, a

³⁵² V. LESNÝ, RTPW, p. 190.

³⁵³ Quoted in PRABHĀTKUMĀR MUKHOPĀDHYĀY's RJRP II, p. 350.

³⁵⁴ KṢITIMOHAN SEN, *Balākā-kābya-parikramā*. Calcutta 1952, p. 96.

theme we came across when analyzing Rabindranāth's short stories from the nineties of the last century. In these later prose pieces, however, a more rigorous and radical tendency is visible. So in the *Strīr patra* (The Letter of a Wife, 1914) Mr̥nālā leaves her husband and his family; she wants to give an example of revolt against the barbarous system which made her sister Bindā, who was married to a madman, commit suicide. The short story *Pātra o pātrī* (The Bridegroom and the Bride, 1917) describes a man who preferred to leave his home rather than marry against his will and who at last gets happily married to a girl without caste. Nearly all Rabindranāth's short stories written between 1914 and 1917 criticize Hindu society. The poet not infrequently achieved here that true critical realism of which Indian literature and Indian society was in such need.

The largest prose work written in this period is the novel *Ghare bāire* (The Home and World) published for the first time in the *Sabujpatra*, in 1915-16, i. e. the period of the *Swadeśī* movement and the boycott of British goods which Rabindranāth never approved of. In the words he put into the mouth of the prudent landlord Nikhil, who had to win back the love of his wife Bimalā, intoxicated with the patriotic phrases of the talkative *swadeśī* demagogue Sandip, he condemned the violence committed both against small shopkeepers, whose shops the patriots were plundering for foreign goods, and against working people who were forced to buy worse and more expensive Indian goods.

The literary value of the novel is rather doubtful; and it would be difficult to prove Amiya Cakrabarti's assertion, namely that "*Ghare bāire* is considered to be the best Rabindranāth's novel by the European critics."³⁵⁵ In fact, just the opposite is true. It was criticized by many European reviewers for its literary defects; we need only recall the exaggerated criticism by E. M. Forster who called the novel "a boarding-house flirtation that masks itself in mystic and patriotic talk."³⁵⁶ Its value is certainly more historical than artistic, giving only a further proof of Rabindranāth's steady deflection from nationalism.

The problem of nationalism appeared so important and was of such interest to him that he devoted to it his lectures in Japan and America where he was travelling in 1916-17. These lectures were published in English in a small book called *Nationalism*, in 1917. In its first two parts, Rabindranāth criticized, in fact, not nationalism but imperialism in the West and in Japan, in the third, then, he laid stress on the social roots of many problems of contemporary India, as opposed to the political problems which were too much emphasized at that time. "Tagore's main emphasis was always on social evils," says Sasadhar Sinha. "Unlike the other leaders of the national awakening, he held these as primarily responsible for India's political and economic backwardness."³⁵⁷

³⁵⁵ In the Preface to RENU MITRA's *Rabindranāther Ghare-bāire*. Calcutta 1944, p. 1.

³⁵⁶ Quoted by BUDDHADEB BASU in his book, *An Acre of Green Grass*. Calcutta 1947, p. 16.

³⁵⁷ SASADHAR SINHA, *Tagore's Approach to Social Problems*. Calcutta 1947, p. 16.

Though in 1919, after the well-known massacre of unarmed civilians by British soldiers in Amritsar, Rabindranāth considered it his duty to react by his famous open letter to the Viceroy of India, in which he raised his protest and resigned the British title of knighthood,³⁵⁸ his mind was fully occupied with very different ideas and ideals. Three quotations from his writings at that time will make it clear what these were:

"I am striving with all my power to tune my mood of mind to be in accord with the great feeling of excitement sweeping across my country. But deep in my being why is there this spirit of resistance maintaining its place in spite of my strong desire to remove it? I fail to find a clear answer and through my gloom of dejection breaks out a smile and a voice saying: 'Your place is on the seashore of worlds with children; there is your peace, and I am with you there.'"³⁵⁹

"I love India. But my India is an idea and not a geographical expression. Therefore I am *not* a patriot—I shall seek my compatriots all over the world."³⁶⁰

"It is the dream of my heart, that the cultural centre of our country should also be the meeting ground of East and West."³⁶¹

It was the idea of mutual approach and understanding between East and West which was the main subject of the poet's contemporary writings, practical efforts and numerous trips in foreign countries. It dominated his activities for many years and for this purpose he also founded, in May 1922, his international university in Santiniketan which he called Viśvabhāratī—"in order to realize, at one centre of culture, the spiritual unity of mankind."³⁶²

At the time when he became estranged from the nationalist movement of his country and propagated abroad his ideas on cultural harmony between East and West, Rabindranāth did almost no creative work as a poet. Not until 1922 did he publish his next collection, Śīśu Bholānāth (The Child Bholānāth), a book of children's poetry continuing the Śīśu and not differing from it in any substantial way. In 1922 he published also a collection of shorter prose pieces, mainly lyrical, under the title Lipikā (Sketches), the form of which was of more importance for Rabindranāth's further artistic development than its themes; these "poems in prose" constitute in Rabindranāth's work a transition to the free verse which, later on, greatly enriched the poet's production.

The third of Rabindranāth's works dating from 1922, the symbolical play Muktaadhārā (Free Current), contains some positive ideas, but these are unfortunately too much veiled by the symbolism of plot and dialogues. A year later, however, he wrote the one-act-play Rathyātrā (The Way of the Car) which, in spite of its small size, is one of the keys to the comprehension of the

³⁵⁸ The Calcutta Municipal Gazette, op. cit., p. XXVII.

³⁵⁹ From a letter reprinted in Tagore and Gandhi Argue, ed. by Jag Parvesh Chander. Lahore 1945, pp. 26-7.

³⁶⁰ Letters from Abroad. Madras 1934, p. 95.

³⁶¹ From the article Śikṣār milan, in Kālāntar. Calcutta 1948, p. 186; English translation in The Modern Review, November 1921, p. 542.

³⁶² The Visvabharati. Madras, n. d., p. 13.

poet's conception of the world and politics. In 1932 he returned to this play once again; it is certain that he intended this new version called *Kāler yātrā* (The Way of Time) to be the definite version, as the *Rathyātrā* was published only in a journal.³⁶³ Unlike the original play written in prose, Rabīndranāth here chose the form of free verse and intensified the atmosphere of the drama with interludes of a visionary ascetic and superstitious women.

Time's Car has stopped. Women are lamenting over its rope lying motionless on the road and are afraid of the consequences. Nobody is able to get the Car moving again—the power of magic formulas and prayers of priests which were “the first drawers of Time” have failed as have also the sacrifices offered by the women; even the king with his soldiers can do nothing. A Saint is brought in to help, but his spiritual power proves ineffectual; and the merchants with their treasures, though considered the mightiest men of modern times, do not even succeed in lifting the rope of the Car. All at once a spy brings news: the *śūdras* are coming in crowds to move the Car. They are ready to save the world because, as they say, the Master has called them to seize the rope—and they do actually succeed in setting the Car in motion. Among the townsfolk, soldiers and priests there is great horror that increases when the Car turns aside from the old paths and rushes forward over the military arsenals and the merchants' warehouses. Finally a Poet appears on the scene to explain what has happened. Though he does not believe that the *śūdras* will be able to lead the Car for ever, he approves their action (“Let what is to perish be burned to ashes! / A new age must be built on the ashes of the old”) and is willing to help them by “singing his songs in rhythm.” And he advises his audience:

In some age, some day perhaps
There will come the time to turn the Car.
Then the high with the low will be equal again.
From this moment take care of bonds
And lift the rope of the Car into your hearts,
Don't leave it lying in the dust!
Don't turn the earth into mud with the water of your sacrifices!
Let those live who have been dying so long,
Let those stand up with heads uplifted
Who for whole ages have been bowed!

The picture of society and its forces and classes painted in this drama is a true picture of society in the modern capitalist world. The Poet—and there is no doubt that through him Rabīndranāth expresses his own ideas—shows the *śūdras*, the working people, as the only force capable of carrying forward the development. Although he does not believe that this overthrow is the last one in the history of mankind and prophesies another one, a still higher stage in his conception, when a Poet will be needed to bring Time's Car into motion again, with its rhythm and beauty, he goes along now already to help the *śūdras* with his songs; because with all his heart he welcomes the liberation of those who have suffered in oppression, and life for those who have been only dragging out an existence.

³⁶³ Prabāśī, agrahāyaṇ 1330, i.e. 1923, pp. 216–25.

The drama *Raktakarabī* (Red Oleanders, 1924), another symbolical play written in this period, is likewise a eulogy of life, a eulogy of freedom and youth.

In one of his talks given in China, where Rabindranāth travelled in 1924, he said: "Most of my life I have spent in giving expression to thoughts born of solitude and communion with Nature."³⁶⁴ And the same motifs also play an important role in the following three collections of poems—in *Pūrābī* (1925), *Mahuyā* (1929) and *Banabānī* (The Message of the Forest, 1931). When compared with the poet's previous as well as subsequent poetry, they appear to be, in spite of their considerable bulk, books of subordinate importance for his development.

More interesting are his two novels published in 1928: *Yogāyog* (Junction and Disjunction), and especially *Śeṣer kabitā* (The Last Poem) which strongly influenced the contemporary young generation of Bengal.³⁶⁵ Both books are colourful, though not particularly deep, pictures of the life of the well-to-do classes of Bengali society.

In 1930, Rabindranāth visited Soviet Russia. The immediate result of this journey was his book *Rāṣīyār ciṭhi* (Letters from Russia) in which he evaluated, without political bias, the achievements of the Soviet people in the thirteen years of the existence of the Soviet Republic and made frequent comparisons with the results of two hundred years of British colonial rule in India. He was amazed at many of the things he saw in Soviet Russia and did not try to conceal his amazement. With warm admiration, he commented especially on the successes of the Soviet State in solving the agricultural problem and in spreading education. Though he did not agree with or understand the class-roots of the solution of social problems in the U. S. S. R. and warned against "anger, class hatred and revengefulness,"³⁶⁶ his appreciation of the achievements of this country were so positive that the English translation of his *Rāṣīyār ciṭhi* was prohibited.

The journey to the Soviet Union became obviously a rich source of new ideas for Rabindranāth. He saw the basic difference between the results of the Soviet system and British rule in India. "Against the background of the recent Soviet visit, conditions nearer home presented a spectacle gloomier than ever," says Niharranjan Ray.³⁶⁷ And so Rabindranāth learned to condemn the British more sharply for their policy of deliberative neglect of the Indian economy and the people's education; in his further political speeches and articles there sounded a more decidedly anti-British tone.

³⁶⁴ Talks in China. Visvabharati Series, n. d., p. 134.

³⁶⁵ Cf. the testimony given by BUDDHADEB BASU in his *Rabindranāth: Kathāsā-hitya*. Calcutta 1955, pp. 125-44.

³⁶⁶ Rabindranath Tagore in Russia, ed. by P. C. MAHALANOBIS. *Visva-Bharati Bulletin*, No. 15, November 1930, p. 37.

³⁶⁷ Rabindranath, Greater India Series, No. 4. Calcutta 1944, p. 94.

After this visit, Rabīndranāth no longer stood aside from the struggle of the Indian people as he did in 1919–22. In September 1931, he took part, in Calcutta, in a protest demonstration against the massacre of Indian political prisoners in a British detention camp in Hijli and was the main speaker there, unable “to deny the call of the victims whose voice has been silenced for ever by the homicidal callousness of their appointed guardians.”³⁶⁸ The most important fact, however, was that, after a pause of many years, political and social reality again found its way into his poetry.

In 1932, his collection *Parīṣeṣ* (The End) appeared, containing poems from 1929 till 1932. Again Rabīndranāth feels himself a poet “who is near to the earth” and dwells “on this side of the stream”; again, and in a still higher degree, there appears that deep interest in man which became weaker in his pre-1930 work. In the poem *Bāmśī* (The Flute), a social ballad, he was able to express the deep sorrow of a young Calcutta clerk who strives to keep body and soul together on a salary of twenty-five rupees a month, gives private lessons to get a meal and spends his evenings at the station to save electric light.

This poem is worth attention for two reasons. Firstly, because it is a finger-post to that road which all true artists of modern times must take—the road to man, the road to a real understanding of a man, not a romantic hero in a social vacuum, but one of the individuals who form the fabric of human society. Towards this man Rabīndranāth’s road is tending—and still more clearly and directly after 1930 than at any time before.

Secondly, the poem is notable for its form—the free verse which the seventy-year-old poet introduced into his poetry with the innovator’s courage peculiar to himself. Very rightly his son Rathīndranāth considered this circumstance a proof of his father’s mental vigour: “What struck me most was the amazing vitality of his mind. Never for a day did he cease to grow. Some of the boldest experiments in literary technique were made late in life, when one is loth to break new ground. He discarded rhymes and turned to *vers libre* when he was about seventy.”³⁶⁹

And Rabīndranāth’s next collection *Punaśca* (Once Again, 1932) is not only a proof that its author was happy in choosing free verse for the new form of his poetic expression, but also that he had taken a further step along the road on which he had set out. Thus the poem *Sādhāraṇ meye* (A Simple Woman) is the letter of a Bengali woman to the writer Śaratcandra Caṭṭopādhyāy in which she asks him not to look for unusual types of Indian women for his novels, but to write the story of a simple woman such as she is, to write about her desires and hopes, about the dreams of a woman who “does not know French or German, / but who knows how to weep.” In the *Nūtan kāl* (New Age), the poet expressed his ever youthful endeavour to keep pace with the swift current of

³⁶⁸ Chittagong and Hijli. The Modern Review, October 1931, pp. 477–81.

³⁶⁹ Father As I Knew Him. The Visva-Bharati Quarterly 18, Part 4, February–April 1953, p. 351.

time, in the *Mānabputra* (The Son of Man) he condemned those who from the temple door send soldiers to kill, in the *Śīśutīrtha* (Pilgrimage to a Child), an apocalyptic vision of Man's eternal pilgrimage to Man, he celebrated "Man newly born and yet already living for ages"; though at times the symbolics of this long poem make its episodes and images difficult to understand, the whole poem has a clear perspective—the victorious end of the wanderings of humanity in search of Man, the most precious treasure of history.

After the *Punaśca*, Rabīndranāth returned for a short time to prose and drama. He published his last three novels, *Dui bon* (Two Sisters, 1932), *Mālañca* (A Flower-Garden, 1933) and *Cār adhyāy* (Four Chapters, 1934), shorter prose works from the milieu of the modern Bengali bourgeoisie, the last one using the background of the terrorist movement. Among his three dramas written in 1933, the symbolical play *Tāser deś* (The Country of Cards) stands out, a satire whose butt is the "misplaced conservatism, conventionality, inactivity and retrogressiveness"³⁷⁰ of the orthodox Hindu society, incapable of progress and development because of its countless religious and social restrictions.

In 1935 Rabīndranāth published two collections of poetry, the *Śeṣ saptak* (The Last Seven) and the *Bīthikā* (Alley). In these poems there appeared a feature characteristic of the works he created in the last years of his life—a reckoning up with life and a surveying of the long way lying behind. But these feelings, fully comprehensible in a poet of seventy-four, were not for Rabīndranāth the signal to retreat from life. He took stock of past achievements in order to advance, to go "from the new to the new," to go on to the end. His determination to fight as long as he had breath, and not to stop, not to fossilize even on the last stage of the journey, gave the poet strength

"to send greetings in his songs / to the tops of the mountain of the rising sun / from the coast of the Western ocean,"

to welcome everything new leading the world and humanity to better tomorrows.

In these two collections, and especially in his next book of free verses *Patrapuṭ* (Armful of Leaves, 1935), Rabīndranāth returned not only to his own life and creation; very frequently in this poetry there appeared what Niharrañjan Ray called "historical consciousness,"³⁷¹ a conception of the development of the world and humanity as a ceaseless fight of good against evil, a fight waged by Man. To the second edition of the *Patrapuṭ* (1938), the poet added two political poems, *Āphrikā* (Africa) condemning Mussolini's aggression in Abyssinia, and *Buddham śaraṇam gacchāmi* (I take shelter in Buddha), pillorying the barbarous cruelties of Japanese armies in China as well as their misuse of religion as a false pretext for their disgusting aims. Poems like this were harbingers of the new creation of his last phase.

In September 1937 Rabīndranāth fell seriously ill. His poetic genius crystallized to a rich fulness in those critical days when he had to fight hard for his life with

³⁷⁰ V. LESNÝ, RTPW, p. 266.

³⁷¹ Op. cit., pp. 99–118.

a treacherous illness. Even in his illness he did not remain silent, and he sang the more after his recovery. The poetic crop of the last period of his life was a real culmination and placed the crown upon his life's work. Though it clearly bears the mark of the last harvest—or just because of it—it was no expression of escape from reality and poetic responsibility, but the final review of many problems and a critical evaluation of his whole life and work. Here Rabindranāth reached his journey's end and goal as Man.

As early as January 1938 he published a small collection of poems written mostly during his illness and shortly after his recovery, *Prāntik* (On the Border-Line). Most of them are the poet's manly reckoning up with life, tinged with a faint shadow of melancholy, and again expressions of the desire to live fully for the short span that remained to him. The concluding two poems, however, written on the Christmas Eve 1937, after the news of the cruel bombing of Barcelona by Franco's aeroplanes, are manifestations of his deep-felt and spontaneous hatred towards Fascism:

Give me power, O awful Judge, sitting on the throne of Eternity,
give me a voice of thunder, that I may hurl imprecation
upon this cannibal whose gruesome hunger
spares neither women nor children,
that my words of reproach may ever rock
upon the heart throbs of a history humiliated by itself
till this age choked and chained
finds the bed of its final rest in ashes.³⁷²

And in the following poem, which is among Rabindranāth's most famous poetic utterances, he provided the logical and inevitable conclusion to the previous poem in an appeal addressed to the people of the whole world to prepare themselves for a fight against the worst enemy of peace and humanity, against Fascism:

The wriggling snakes foul the air around
With their poisonous breath.
Tender words of peace
Will sound like futile mockery.
And so, before I depart
I send my call out to those
Preparing in every home
For the battle against the beasts in human shape.³⁷³

With this poetry Rabindranāth joined the camp of those progressive artists of the world who were raising their voices and giving a last-hour warning of the danger of Fascism. He was not among those who chose to remain silent in face of the Fascist campaign against humanity. Rabindranāth condemned Fascism at every opportunity; it was he who was elected, in 1937, to be President of the Indian Committee of the League Against Fascism. And his speech, with which

³⁷² English translation in *Visva-Bharati News* 6, No. XII, June 1938, p. 94.

³⁷³ English translation in *Blitz News-magazine*, December 23, 1950, p. 12.

he greeted the New Year 1938 in Santiniketan, was characteristic not only for its strong anti-fascist tone, but also for the fact that it was coloured with the poet's deep and unshakable belief in a bright future for mankind.

"We have no weapons, but we have our spirit. We cannot fight, but if we always remember that the substance of injustice is destruction, though it may appear to flourish, and if we don't forget that at the very foundations of the civilisation of demons a force for good is at work—then we also join the powerful effort for creating the good. We have no guns, but we have our thoughts; and humble though they be we can make our small contribution to the achievement of a great goal."³⁷⁴

In this speech, Rabīndranāth stressed the spirit as his weapon, and rightly so. It was the weapon which he so effectively used in his poetic collection *Seṃjuti* (Evening Lamp, 1938).

In his above study, Niharranjan Ray said: "That Tagore wrote his biography in his own works, that no poet lived his own poetic creation more than Tagore did his own need not be rubbed on those that have any acquaintance with Tagore-literature. But it is hardly ever recognised that Tagore was his own critic, valuer and commentator as well, and this is never more true and patent than in the last phase of his life." And Niharranjan Ray noticed that Rabīndranāth's self-critical tendencies found their most frequent expression in the poems "written on the occasion of his birthday that always gave the poet an opportunity for a review of his life."³⁷⁵

Also in the poem *Janmadin* (The Birthday), which Rabīndranāth put at the head of *Seṃjuti*, he recapitulated much of his life; the war-drums of the Fascists interrupt his dreams, but for them he has only the same words of condemnation and ridicule with which he attacked

"again and again / the stupidity of the Pandits, the oppression by the rich of the poor, / as well as the deformation of beauty by artificiality."

Again he realizes the irresistible flight of time which will tear him out of the arms of life; but he does not cherish in his heart "even a bit of hope for heaven," feeling himself fully a man of this earth; and he again welcomes the passing of time which brings with it ceaseless progress, ceaseless novelties and changes.

One of the most precious poems in *Seṃjuti* is *Calti chabi* (A Trite Picture); the poet contemplates from a distance a simple Bengali village and the everyday life of its inhabitants. He looks at it, reflects how much sorrow is hidden under the idyllic surface of this life as it seems to a chance passer-by, and asks—of himself as well as of others—more interest in the common man and his sufferings.

As regards their significance and artistic form, the two succeeding books of Rabīndranāth's poetry—the *Ākāś-pradīp* (Lamp of the Sky, 1939) and the *Prahāsinī* (Smiling, 1939)—remained far behind the *Seṃjuti*.

³⁷⁴ Prabāsi, māgh 1344, i.e. 1938, p. 557.

³⁷⁵ Op. cit., pp. 113-4.

Numerous were Rabīndranāth's articles and speeches from this period, expressing his unambiguous resistance towards Fascism. The most important of them was his correspondence with the Japanese poet Yone Noguchi from July-October 1938,³⁷⁶ refusing his "message of Asia" to be "identified with deeds which brought exaltation to the heart of Tamer Lane at his terrible efficiency in manslaughter."³⁷⁷ Rabīndranāth spoke here of the artist's function as being inseparable from his moral conscience, and he had every right to do so; in his collection *Nabajātak* (Newly-born, 1940), which is an introduction to the rich literary aftermath of the last two years of his life, he was engaged in giving proof that it was just this moral conscience and responsibility which was the aim and purpose of his creative work.

Rabīndranāth wrote these poems shortly before the outbreak of the second World War and in its first months. The whole collection clearly bears the stamp of the time and atmosphere in which it was created—and also of the positive qualities of its author. In so far as the poet looked back, he did so only to review critically his own contribution to the building of a better and more righteous world, not to mourn for the "idyllic" old times of peace. With youthful optimism he turned his gaze towards the future:

"You new guest, / the new age looks along the road you will come / with eager impatience"

—so he greeted in the introductory poem of the *Nabajātak* a nameless new-born child as a symbol of the "eternal message of hope which the child of man proclaims again and again." And the future already began to shape itself before his eyes through the clouds of war which were gathering all round the horizon—a future bright and shining. "The new life in the new light / will awake in the new world," he wrote in the poem *Prāyaścitta* (Penance) reacting to the Munich Pact. And he again examined his conscience as a poet in order to ask how much he had helped to make this vision of the future a reality (*Jaydhvani*, Benediction). In this poem we can discern a real programme in the work of his last phase; he reproaches himself for having taken so little part in fighting against "disrespect towards Man and proud malice" and confesses his belief in humanity, which is the aim of his poetic work. Man is the central theme of these poems—also of those few beautiful pictures of nature in which one can feel the poet's strong desire to interpret for others everything he sees and perceives.

One of Rabīndranāth's characteristic traits to which we have repeatedly drawn attention becomes really astonishing in a poet at this great age; it is his mental youth—not a mere feeling of youth, but a real youthfulness of ideas not allowing the poet any respite, but continually driving him to new experiments in poetry, art and music. An example of this youth is his new version of an older play, the *Nṛtyanāṭya Caṇḍālikā* (*Caṇḍālikā*, the Dance Drama, 1938)

³⁷⁶ Poet to Poet. *Visva-Bharati Bulletin*, November 1938.

³⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

in which he proves that even songs can be composed without rhymes. "In his *nṛtya-nāṭyas* Tagore has created a new type of esthetic expression where poetry is blended with music, dance and drama and all are of equal importance," states Sukumar Sen.³⁷⁸

The Nabajātak profited very much by the circumstance that the poet did not include in it many of his more intimate and less significant poems from 1938–40 which he published separately in the *Sānāi* (Flute, 1940). In summer of the same year his book of reminiscences *Chelebelā* (Boyhood) appeared, followed by the *Tin saṅgi* (Three), a collection of three short stories, in which the main aim of the author was obviously not the theme itself, but rather its stylistic elaboration—as if he wanted to make use of his long years' experience as the greatest Bengali short-story writer to find new ways of developing this genre. We may connect, in this respect, the *Tin saṅgi* with the *Charā* (Rhymes, 1941), a slender volume of satiric poems, remarkable for their form taken over from folk-poetry and a highly colloquial and modernized language not afraid even to use many English words naturalized in Bengali.

In September 1940, Rabindranāth again fell seriously ill. Even then, however, he did not give up writing; he welcomed the New Year 1941 with a new collection *Rogaśayyāy* (In Illness), the title of which indicates a great part of its contents—the ideas and thoughts of a sick poet. In this book we find many poems "drawn from reminiscences," as is rightly stated by the poet's biographer Prabhātkumār Mukhopādhyāy.³⁷⁹ Thus poem No. 26 is a passionate declaration of "love for every moment of life" in which the poet sees the highest purpose of his existence and work.

This love of life, of all its manifestations, of nature and its beauties and, above all, of Man, is so predominant in Rabindranāth's subsequent poetry that it gives its basic tone and colouring to all his poems, especially those in the book *Ārogya* (Reconvalescence) containing his poetry from the first two months of 1941. This love permeates with its warmth memories of the most simple things of life, images "fallen into the ditch at the side of life's road"—a river ferry, picture of a village, a boatman's song disturbing night's silence, vast fields with the monotonous gurgle of water in channels.

Everything I have seen and heard on my wanderings,
All those impressions of passing moments
Hidden behind the boundary of the region of my consciousness
Awoke today in my mind.
It's the pain of having to bid farewell to life
Which is projecting, along with the sound of distant bells,
All those forgotten pictures.

But the poet's awareness of "having to bid farewell to life" is evident not only in the melancholy tone of this poetry abounding in love, but also in a clearly

³⁷⁸ SUKUMAR SEN, p. 310.

³⁷⁹ PRABHĀTKUMĀR MUKHOPĀDHYĀY, RJRP IV, p. 145.

discernible effort to express in these last verses everything he still wanted to say, to give definitive utterance to many of his ideas and conceptions which he had either reached in this concluding stage of his life or in whose full expression he was formerly hindered by doubts or considerations for his surroundings. And so we find in the *Ārogya* the immortal poem No. 19 in which he was able to see and show, in sharp contrast, among the people marching down the long road of Indian history, the foreign conquerors, on the one hand, and the people of India, on the other; and he became sure that even the last group of foreigners, the powerful English, will be swept away by "Time's current," leaving

"not a sign behind them / on the empty path of the starry realm."

The poem ends in a magnificent vision of millions continuing the never-ending task of building up India:

Sorrows and joys unceasing
Blend in chant raising the mighty hymn of life.
On the ruins of hundreds of empires
They go on working.³⁸⁰

The poet's eightieth birthday, in May 1941, was celebrated by the whole of India. Rabindranāth himself celebrated it, too, by publishing two new works—the *Janmadine* (The Birthday) and the *Galpasalpa* (Talking), the latter being a collection of stories, reminiscences and poems for his granddaughter. The *Janmadine*, however, is a true culmination of Rabindranāth's poetic creation, in two directions; after it he wrote only a few poems published posthumously in the *Śeṣ lekhā* (Last Writings). First, he returned here for the last time to his vision of a shining future of mankind which he firmly believed in. Secondly, he achieved in this book a definitive formulation of his legacy to future poets based on unsparing auto-criticism and on a severe evaluation of his own poetic work. We refer to the famous poem No. 10, the conclusion of which we shall quote here in as literal a translation as possible:

I am a poet of the world; whenever its sounds arise
They awake an echo in my flute;
And yet many of its calls
Remained unanswered.
Many times in moments of silence my soul has filled
With melodies of the great symphony of the world . . .
Most distant does the man remain in his spirit,
Which cannot be measured by space or time.
He is to be found in his heart,
To know him means to get inside him.
I have not always found the way in,
Fenced round by the barriers of my life.
The farmer tills the soil with his plough,
The weaver weaves at his loom, the fisherman casts his net —
Their various works are spread far,

³⁸⁰ English translation in *Poems*, Calcutta 1946, p. 201.

The whole world is carried forward by them.
 From my narrow window I did not see all of them —
 From the height where I dwelt in the eternal exile of my glory.
 Now and then I went to the fence of their colonies,
 But I had not the strength to cross over.
 When the poet does not unite his life with others' lives
 The basket of his songs becomes overburdened with false goods.
 I have to admit with shame —
 Not full were my melodies.
 My songs, I know,
 Though going various ways, did not reach everywhere.
 That is why I am waiting for a poet
 Who is a partner in the peasants' life,
 Who can become their brother in deed and speech,
 Who is near to the soil.
 At the banquet of literature
 Let him give what I could not provide,
 Let him not cheat the eyes with empty gestures.
 There is no good stealing the literary glory
 Without repaying it with true value.
 Come, Poet of unfamous men,
 Of silent hearts!
 Liberate the pain within them —
 Fill with rain
 This dead land without songs,
 This desert without pleasures dried up in the hot sun
 Of contempt.
 Open the source
 Hidden in its bowels.
 Those who are dumb in sorrows and happiness,
 Those who stand with their heads bent
 Before the face of the world,
 O Poet,
 Those who are remote—let their voice resound!
 Be their kinsman,
 Let them find glory in your glory.
 I shall be the first
 To welcome you again and again.

With this poem—though chronologically not his last work, before his death on the 7th August 1941—Rabindranāth concluded his wonderfully fertile literary creation.^{380a} In it he wrote his epitaph in which he left his most beautiful legacy to his followers and the readers of his work and showed them the way to the highest aim of art, to a real knowledge of Man and to real service to mankind.

^{380a} Later poems of Rabindranāth Tagore, translated and introduced by A. Bose, 1974.

BEFORE INDEPENDENCE

Personalities of such great genius and vast field of literary activities as have been Rabīndranāth Thākur's always affect their contemporaries and successors like a catalyst. Poets of mediocre talent succumb to their influence and become their epigons, unable to find their own way of artistic expression. More gifted and ambitious poets, however, consciously and programmatically try to differentiate themselves from the great predecessor and strive after originality with doubled energy, opening new domains and unbeaten paths to literature.³⁸¹

We shall refrain from describing that large number of Bengali writers and poets who did not enrich their literature by new tones, but followed the patterns of Tagorean poetry, short stories or dramas, even though some of them did write a number of books and found their way to the Bengali readers of the time. Of much more importance, for the further development of Bengali literature, were those who succeeded in asserting their originality and started new lines of development, either on the thematic level and ideology, or in the matter of literary form.

One of the most remarkable personalities to do so was Kāzi Nazrul Islām (born 1899)³⁸²—remarkable in many a respect. First of all, he was a Muslim and the first great representative of the numerically prevailing Muslim community to excel in modern Bengali literature. Secondly, as a poor village boy and an orphan, he was not able to acquire any formal education, his knowledge of European literature was rather limited and the originality of his poetry was accounted for, to a large extent, by his selfmade-man's attitude. And finally, his spontaneous verse reflected, in an amazingly sincere way, the revolutionary moods of Indian youth after the first Great War.

Nazrul Islām was a man full of energy and restlessness. In 1917 he enlisted in the army and joined the 49th Bengali Regiment serving in Karachi and in Iraq. It was during his military service that his first poetic as well as prosaic attempts appeared in Calcutta journals, attracting considerable attention. In 1920 he returned to Calcutta to devote all his time to literature, not only as a poet but also as an editor of literary magazines, especially the *Dhumketu* (Comet, 1922). Though he is still alive, his literary career was rather short. Around 1930, a series of family tragedies turned his unsteady mind towards occultism and

³⁸¹ On the poets of the thirties till the sixties: NIRMAL GHOSE, *Studies in modern Bengal poetry*, Calcutta 1968. Anthologies: HUMAYUN KABIR (editor), *Green and gold. Stories and poems from Bengal*, London 1958; BUDDHADEVA BOSE, *An anthology of Bengali writing (fiction, drama, essays, poetry)*, Calcutta 1971; D. K. GUPTA transl. by N. DEVI, *Best stories of modern Bengal*, Calcutta 1944.

³⁸² MIZANUR RAHMAN, *Nazrul Islam*, Dacca, 1966; SERAJUL ISLAM CHAUDHURY, *Introducing Nazrul Islam*, Karachi 1965; B. CHAKRAVARTY, *Kazi Nazrul Islam*, New Delhi 1968; *Selected Poems*, translated by KABIR CHAUDHURY, Dacca 1963; a selection of his poetry was translated into Russian by M. KURGANTSEV, Moscow 1963.

religious devotion and he hardly wrote anything remarkable more. Then, in 1943, he was struck by paralysis and has been spending his days out of touch with life, in his Calcutta home and, since 1974, in Dacca.

The number of books published by Nazrul Islām is more than fifty, including less relevant novels and collections of short stories. Some of his writings were proscribed by the British and even yielded him a year-long imprisonment. This, of course, only strengthened his popularity among the contemporary Bengali youth who adored his revolutionary poetry, calling to arms against the foreign oppression. He was called *Bidrohī* (Rebel) which was also the title of one of his most famous poems (1921). His books *Agnibīṇā* (The Lute of Fire, 1922) and *Biṣer bāmṣī* (The Poison Flute, 1924) breathed the same spirit of revolt and patriotic enthusiasm. Much of his poetry was songs of which he wrote about 3,300, setting them himself to music in a new and very effective style.

It was not, however, only political issues which excited and inspired the poet. His verse has a distinct social undertone, often protesting against economic discrimination and exploitation of the poor, with a more instinctive than rationalistic or even philosophical opposition to the wrongs of the contemporary society.

In general, Nazrul Islām was an emotional poet, and it was his emotionality which appealed so strongly to his readers and listeners. His verse tended to hyperbole—not without reason it was characterized by Rabīndranāth Thākura as an attempt “to shave with a sword”—and often overstepped that thin border-line separating emotionality from sentimentalism. Its exalted diction makes it very difficult to render them adequately into a European language.

A different way was chosen by the poet Satyendranāth Datta (1882–1922).³⁸³ Though an ardent supporter of the Svadeśī and Non-cooperation movement, he concentrated upon the refinement of the form of Bengali poetry, with conscious rationalism rather than the emotionality which is so typical of the majority of Bengali poets. He knew several foreign languages and consistently translated European as well as Asian poems, utilizing every possibility offered by his mother tongue to render their inner contents in an adequate Bengali expression. In his original poetry, for instance the *Phuler phasal* (The Crops of Flowers, 1911), the *Kuhu o kekā* (The Cuckoo and Peacock, 1912) and the *Abhra ābir* (Mica and Vermillion Dust, 1916), he experimented with metrical forms and a melodious diction based on a well-calculated selection of words out of his extraordinarily rich vocabulary. It is in this respect that also his last two books of poems excelled, the *Belāṣeṣer gān* (Songs of the End of the Day, 1922) and the *Bidāy arāti* (The Farewell Salutation, 1922).

³⁸³ HARAPRASĀD MITRA, *Satyendranāth Datter kabitā o kābyarūp*, Calcutta 1964. For English translations of modern Bengali poetry, see *A Book of Bengali Verse*, compiled and edited by NANDAGOPAL SENGUPTA, Calcutta 1969; and *Modern Bengali Poems*, translated by M. KIRKMAN, edited by D. CHATTERJEE, Calcutta 1945.

Characteristic of Satyendranāth's poetry is the scent of the far-away and the echo of the wide world's voices combined with a tint of true modernity. He had many admirers both among younger readers and poets; many of the latter were influenced by him and more than one of them tried to imitate him.

A few years before Nazrul Islām, the Bengali literary stage was stirred by the writings of Śaratcandra Caṭṭopādhyāy (1876–1938),³⁸⁴ a no less remarkable personality but as an author active in the field of prose fiction. Also orphaned early, he spent a long time outside Bengal, in Bihar and in Burma, and though his first story was published already in 1904, it was not till a decade later that his books began to appear regularly. His popularity was, and to a certain degree still is, enormous, not only in Bengal but also in other parts of India; his books are reported to be translated into other Indian languages more often than those of Rabindranāth.

Śaratcandra's novels and short stories, the high number of which reveal a prolific writer, won the hearts of the widest circles of Bengali readers both by their subjects and the author's approach. "Where Rabindranath stopped Śaratcandra Chatterjee began," says Surendranath Sen speaking of questions of love and relations between men and women which constitute the main theme of Śaratcandra's writings. "What he (i.e. Rabindranath) cautiously left in the background, Chatterjee deliberately brought to the forefront."³⁸⁵ Śaratcandra was, to a remarkable degree, free from social conventions and prejudice, and his hatred of any discrimination of women in Hindu society and their frequent and ruthless oppression was deep-felt and sincere. Not infrequently he turned the heroines of his novels into free women rebelling against their traditional lot. Acalā in his *Gṛhadāha*³⁸⁶ (*The Burnt Home*, 1919) leaves her husband and follows the call of her heart; Kiraṇmayī in the *Caritrahīn* (*The Unchaste One*, 1917) openly declares the right of any woman to a free love choice; and Abhayā in the *Śrīkānta* (4 vols., 1917–33)³⁸⁷ refuses to live with a husband who neglects and does not love her. Less convincingly, he treated the question of women's emancipation in one of his last novels, the *Śeṣ praśna* (*The Last Question*, 1931).

As rightly stressed by Sukumar Sen,³⁸⁸ Śaratcandra was at his best when he was able to utilize his own experience. This is true of his *Pallī samāj* (*The Village Community*, 1916) as well as the *Śrīkānta* mentioned above; especially its

³⁸⁴ S. C. SENGUPTA, *Saratcandra*, Calcutta 1945; HUMAYUN KABIR, *Saratcandra*, Bombay 1942; SUBODHCANDRA SENGUPTA, *Śaratcandra*, Calcutta 1949; ABINĀSCANDRA GHOṢĀL, *Śaratcandra grantha-bibaraṇī*, Calcutta 1963; the author's complete works were edited in the *Śarat-sāhitya saṃgraha*, 13 vols., Calcutta 1961–67.

³⁸⁵ In the article *Modern Bengali Literature*. *The Calcutta Review*, 3rd Series, 10, No. 1, January 1924, p. 47.

³⁸⁶ Translated into Russian by S. CIRIN, Moscow 1959.

³⁸⁷ In English by K. C. SEN and THE ODORIA THOMPSON, London 1922; in Russian by S. CIRIN, Moscow 1960.

³⁸⁸ SUKUMAR SEN, HBL, p. 346.

first part containing the charming episode of Indranāth, one of the best-drawn child characters in Bengali literature, will undoubtedly ever remain Śaratcandra's greatest gift to it.

One of the main reasons of Śaratcandra's immense popularity among the masses of Indian readers was that in his stories and novels he depicted with deep sympathy the lower strata of society, on the one hand, and the victims of both social and economic oppression, on the other. As stated by Alokrañjan Dāśgupta and Debīprasād Bandyopādhyāy, he was certainly no revolutionary, but "a man of good advice, an honest speaker of the simple people and an exalted opponent to conservatism."³⁸⁹ It was both the strong point of his writings as well as their weakness that, unlike Rabīndranāth, he did not rise above his themes and poor heroes but wrote as if being one of them; his stories and novels have thus gained a distinct directness and strong emotional effectiveness, but are lacking in that distance which is necessary for a truly artistic elaboration of any subject.

Śaratcandra did not belong to the sophisticated type of writer. It was his strong emotionality, very often bordering on sentimentality, which appealed so much to his countrymen, but which, at the same time, prevented him from gaining any popularity outside India. He had, however, with his heartfelt sympathies with the victims of social injustice paved the way for the next generation of Bengali writers who approached these subjects and characters on a higher level.

Somewhat similar was the attitude adopted in his novels and short stories by Bibhūtibhūṣaṇ Bandyopādhyāy (1899–1950). He was the son of a poor village priest and in many of his writings we find autobiographical traits, but they give evidence of a deeper psychological insight than Śaratcandra's work. It was especially his novel *Pather pāṃcālī* (Song of the Road, 1929) and its sequel *Aparājita* (1932) which made his name;³⁹⁰ the former offers a rare view of the poor village society as seen by two children of a village Brahmin who is hardly able to make his family's living. Bibhūtibhūṣaṇ wrote a number of other novels, e.g. *Āraṇyak* (The Wild, 1938), *Ādarśa Hindu hoṭel* (The Ideal Hindu Hotel, 1940), *Anubartan* (Imitation, 1942) etc., but many of them did not profit by the author's predilection for the occult phenomena of life because he did not succeed in expressing them adequately. He wrote, however, many excellent short stories which developed the heritage of Rabīndranāth.

It is worth noticing that Bandyopādhyāy's (Banerji's) *Pather pāṃcālī*, just like other modern Bengali novels — e. g. Bhattacharya's *He who rides a Tiger* — show the persistence of the classical Indian aesthetic categories in

³⁸⁹ BSR, p. 448.

³⁹⁰ It was filmed by Satyajit Rāy and translated also into English by T. W. CLARK and TARAPADA MUKHERJI (London 1968), and French, by F. BHATTACHARYA (Paris 1969).

contemporary Bengali literature, that is, the influence of the classical aesthetic tradition on some of its authors^{390a}.

Very prolific, though artistically not always successful is Acintyakumār Sengupta (b. 1903), the best of whose writings cannot be denied, however, a sincere effort to open the door of literature to the hard facts of life and intimate human relations (Bede, *The Gypsy*, 1928; Bibāher ceye bara, *Greater than Marriage*, 1931; Prācīr o prāntar, *The Wall and the Distance*, 1932, etc.). Much favoured by his readers are his short stories which have appeared in many collections, and his very popular book on Rāmakṛṣṇa.

Whereas the writings by Cārucandra Bandyopādhyāy (1876–1938) and Saundramohan Mukhopādhyāy (b. 1884) were not particularly original—the latter excelled more as a translator—Kedārnāth Bandyopādhyāy (1863–1949) appeared on the Bengali literary stage in his mature years with remarkable stories and novels characterized by a peculiar mixture of “tenderness and humour”³⁹¹ and an ability to revive the atmosphere of the good old days. As so many of his contemporaries, he was better in short stories than novels. Among his collections of stories, the Āmrā ki o ke (What and Who Are We?, 1927), the Pātheya (Travelling Expenses, 1930) and the Namaskārī (With a Greeting, 1944) deserve special mention.

The direct precursors of the somewhat later heyday of the Bengali short story and novel, which will be dealt with in the next chapter, were Śailajānda Mukhopādhyāy and Jagadīscandra Gupta whose writings enriched this literature in the twenties.

Śailajānda Mukhopādhyāy (b. 1900) was born in the mining area of Burdwan and it was this milieu and the life of coal miners which was the subject of many of his stories which were collected later in the Kaylākūṭhi (The Coalmine Office, 1930) and the Din-majur (A Day Labourer, 1932). The treatment is realistic and the atmosphere of the stories, in accord with the theme, gloomy. Also many of his novels, e.g. Jhaṛo hāwā (Stormy Wind, 1923), Māṭir ghar (House of Mud, 1923), Ṣola-ānā (Sixteen Annas, 1925) etc., though less successful than his short stories, were inspired by the same area. Śailajānda is considered to be the founder of the rather prominent tradition of regional fiction in modern Bengali literature.

Jagadīscandra Gupta (1886–1957) made his name as a poet, but he never excelled in verse as he did in his short stories, which are marked by the same realistic tendency as Śailajānda's. Jagadīscandra was, however, more attracted by the psychology of his heroes and certain influence of Freudism may be traced in his writings. Among these are collections of short stories (Binodini, 1928; Śrīmatī, 1930; Śaśāṅka Kabirājer strī, *The Wife of Śaśāṅka the Physician*, 1935, etc.) which are better than his novels (Asādhu Siddhārtha, *Dishonest Siddhārtha*, 1929; Mahiṣī, 1929; Romanthan, *Cud-chewing*, 1931, etc.).

^{390a} See E. GEROW, in E. C. DIMOCK, E. GEROW etc., *The Literatures of India*, Chicago and London 1974, p. 212ff.

³⁹¹ ALOKRAJAN DĀSGUPTA and DEBĪPRASĀD BANDYOPĀDHYĀY, BSR, p. 450.

Both of these writers published their short stories in various literary magazines the appearance of which is the most characteristic trait of the twenties. Let us remember the importance of journals and papers, at the very beginning of the modernization movement in the 19th century. It is there that the beginning of the Bengali magazine tradition is to be looked for, a tradition which has continued with undiminished force till today. Periodicals such as the Young Bengal's *Jñānanveṣaṇ*, Īśvarcandra Gupta's *Sambād prabhākar*, Akṣaykumār Datta's *Tattvabodhini patrikā*, Pyāricāṃd Mitra's *Māsik patrikā*, Rājendralāl Mitra's *Bibidhārtha saṃgraha*, Baṅkimcandra Caṭṭopādhyāy's *Baṅgadarśan*, the *Ṭhākurs'* *Bhāratī*, Ramānanda Caṭṭopādhyāy's *Prabāsi* or *Pramatha* Caudhuri's *Sabujpatra*, to mention only the most important ones, were real pivots of the literary life in Bengal, in the respective periods, and attracted poets and writers to group together either around prominent personalities or round a common literary and ideological programme. Of no less significance was their mutual competition raising the level of literary creation, and their consistent education of their readers.

In the twenties of the present century, many new magazines appeared, among which especially three deserve attention because they were the main platforms of the modernists. In 1923, Gokulcandra Nāg and Dineśrañjan Dās founded the *Kallol* (Stormy Current), followed by the *Kāli-kalam* (Ink and Pen) of Premendra Mitra, Muralidhar Basu and Śailajānanda Mukhopādhyāy, in 1927, and by Nareścandra Sengupta's *Pragati* (Progress), in 1928; the last one was published from Dacca.

The common aim of these and some other new journals was well summed up by Nandagopāl Sengupta:

"... There came the *Kallol*, the *Kāli-kalam* and other magazines, then, and in the literature which they distributed all over the country, a distinct consciousness of a new age was manifested. The lives of the people standing on the lowest steps of society who were deceived, cursed and disapproved, started to become the subject of stories and novels. In verse and prose, that hunger, thirst, work and fancy which people had recognized in life but had not considered admissible in literature and arts, started to be voiced. A tide of new youth flooded the soil turned barren by the cleanliness of the *Prabāsi* and the cleverness of the *Sabujpatra*."³⁹²

It was, indeed, conventions and taboos in literature against which young poets and writers, grouping around these journals in ever higher numbers, rebelled. Unavoidably there followed polemics and discussions on the very principles of literary creation among the representatives of different literary groups and schools, and further magazines were founded to express the ever more minute differentiation of views and ideas, especially Sudhindranāth Datta's *Paricay* (Acquaintance, 1931), Sañjay Bhaṭṭācārya's *Pūrāśa* (Fulfilled Hope) and Buddhadeb Basu's *Kabitā* (Poems, 1935).

³⁹² Uttarsurī IX, 1962, No. 4, p. 488.

It was the transition from the Tagorean Bhārati to the Kallol group which characterized the inner development of Mohitlāl Majumdār (1882–1952) and marked his way from a light and melodious verse aiming at spirituality towards a poetry of social reality and the material world. The milestone in his development was his Svapan-pasāri (A Dealer in Dreams, 1922) revising his previous attitude to life and literature, and the new approach was expressed in full in the Bismaraṇi (The Forgetful, 1929). In his last years, however, he turned back towards more traditional elements.

Delayed was the poetic début of Yatīndramohan Sengupta (1887–1954), an engineer by profession, whose poetry is a half-satirical and half-sorrowful commentary on the miseries and disappointments of life. His Marīcikā (The Fata Morgana, 1923), Maruśikhā (Flames of the Desert, 1927), Marumāyā (The Illusions of the Desert, 1930), Sāyan (Evening, 1940) and other books bear titles suggestive of his peculiar attitude. As claimed by Subhāṣ Mukhopādhyāy, his Marīcikā was “the first step of Bengali poetry towards modernity.”³⁹³

In spite of all the differences between these two poets, both of them raised their voices in common protest against accepting life as it was, and poetry as its mere reflection, as something melodious and, within the limits of possibility, full of inner harmony. In a way, the general discontent of Indian people with the state of affairs in their country between the two wars was the main cause of the unrest of the new generation of Bengali poets, driving them to look for new ways of expressing their own as well as their intellectual readers’ feelings and ideas. In these efforts, they felt more akin to modern English, American and French poets than to Rabīndranāth or even his Bengali predecessors. It was especially T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound who were eagerly read, often translated and not infrequently imitated.

Sukumar Sen³⁹⁴ regards these two poets as the main influence which caused a “sudden and determined change” in the poetry of Jībanānanda Dāś (1899–1954),³⁹⁵ one of the most remarkable poetic personalities of Bengal in that period. After his first book Jharā pālak (Cast-off Feathers, 1928) he discarded old rhymes and rhythms and started experimenting with verses full of strange metaphors and stray scraps of the unconscious, re-setting this cruel world of ours into a glittering mosaic imbued with irresistible charm. But, as stated by Jyotirmay Datta, “there is the vision of a sympathetic order behind the world’s cruelty, which cannot intervene but keeps company with man in his tragic vigil.”³⁹⁶

Far and near, topple cities, topple homes,
And villages fall with a crash.
Long ages man has spent on earth,
Yet his shadows on the wall

³⁹³ Paricay XXIV, 1954, No. 4, p. 428.

³⁹⁴ SUKUMAR SEN, HBL, p. 372.

³⁹⁵ SANJAY BHATTĀCĀRYA, Ādhunik kabitār bhūmikā, Calcutta 1959.

³⁹⁶ Kabitā, 1960, No. 100, p. 146.

Death, destruction, fear
 Or merely hesitation seems.
 All along the coast of time
 Nothing but emptiness.
 Yet ringing this our bare desert
 Of shame and error, thoughts and dreams,
 Strange trees rustle, cool the land.
 The heart points the way. And wisdom too. And love.³⁹⁷

Jibānānanda did not live a happy life; he lost his teacher's posts both in Calcutta and Delhi, was unemployed for a longer time, had to leave his East Bengali home after Pakistan had been created, and was finally killed in a street accident. His poetry, however, grew mature from one book to the other. They are few in number, due to his self-critical mind: *Dhūsar pāṇḍulipi* (The Faded Manuscript, 1936), *Banalatā Sen* (1942), *Mahāpṛthibī* (The Great Earth, 1944) and *Sāṭṭi tārār timir* (The Darkness of Seven Stars, 1948).³⁹⁸

The second half of the thirties was marked, in Bengal as well as in the other parts of India, by a growth of the leftist tendencies in literature.^{398a} Let us remember the foundation of the All-India Progressive Writers Association (AIPWA), in Lucknow in 1936, and its Conference held in Calcutta, at the end of 1938. The leftist group of writers and poets in Bengal grew both in number and quality during the forties which was an unforgettable period in the history of the Bengali nation. The outbreak of the second World War, the Great Famine in 1942–43, the Hindu-Muslim riots, the gain of Independence accompanied by the partition of Bengal into the Indian West Bengal and East Pakistan, and the massive migration of Hindus from the East to the West and of Muslims the other way about—all these events strongly influenced the literature of the time and were finding immediate reflections in the writings of many a poet and writer.

In the kingdom of hunger, life is prose —
 Even the full moon reminds of a loaf of bread,

said Sukānta Bhaṭṭācārya (1926–1947),³⁹⁹ the talented, but prematurely deceased poet of hunger and revolution. In a similar tone, many of his contemporaries reacted, both in prose and in verse. Their main organ became *Paricay* (Acquaintance), founded in 1931 by the poet Sudhīndranāth Datta from whom they took it over, changing it into the foremost leftist monthly of Bengal which it has remained till now.

³⁹⁷ Translation *ibid.*, p. 71, by JYOTIRMAY DATTA.

³⁹⁸ In English, Banalata Sen and Other Poems, Calcutta 1962.

^{398a} Cf. D. K. BISWAS, *Sociology of major Bengali novels*, Gurgaon 1974.

³⁹⁹ AŚOK BHATṬĀCĀRYA, *Kabi Sukānta*, Calcutta 1958, and *Kabi-kiśor Sukānta*, Calcutta 1967.

AFTER INDEPENDENCE

Since the 15th of August 1947, the two parts of Bengal have been living separate lives. The partition of Bengal into a part of India and East-Pakistan meant the creation of two Bengali literatures which, due to the unhappy development of political relations between the two states, were almost completely separated from each other. Naturally enough, this development has resulted in stressing the differences between the Muslim Bengali intelligentsia concentrated in East Bengal, nowadays Bangladesh, and their Hindu colleagues living in the Indian West Bengal.

In West Bengal, the main and uncontested centre of which has remained Calcutta, literary life continued without any interruption after partition. Practically all prominent Hindu poets, writers, journalists, teachers etc. previously living in the Eastern part of the country found a new home in Calcutta, thus strengthening the position of Bengali literature there. With undiminished enthusiasm they went on enlarging the scope of their literature, with ever new tones added by the representatives of younger generations of poets and writers. But the leading voice belonged, of course, to those who had started their literary career in the pre-War period and among whom the liberation of India brought about a more minute differentiation, both in ideology and in artistic methods.

We have concluded the previous chapter by stating that it was especially the leftist tendencies which grew rather prominent during the forties. In prose, the main and the most valuable issue of this development was a remarkable progress of the short story which in general may be considered the strongest component of modern Bengali literature.

One of its most outstanding representatives was Mānik Bandyopādhyāy (1910–1956), for several years till his death the uncontested leader of the Communist writers of Bengal. His proper name was Prabodhkumār Bandyopādhyāy and he was born and grew up in the countryside which deeply influenced his writings in the first half of his career. It was especially the Eastern Bengali village which inspired him to write his two most notable novels, in 1936—*Padmā nadīr mājhi*⁴⁰⁰ (Boatman of the Padma; English in 1948) and *Putulnācer itikathā*⁴⁰¹ (The Puppets' Dance; English in 1968, under the title *The Puppets' Tale*); the latter "has been accepted as the most powerful Bengali novel of its time."⁴⁰² "We are puppets whom Somebody makes dance but cannot be seen," says one of the many well-portrayed village characters of the novel in which the author concentrates on the fight of man against nature and all those blind

⁴⁰⁰ Translated into English by HIRENDRANATH MUKHERJEE, Bombay 1948; into Russian by A. GORBOVSKIY, Moscow 1959; and into Czech by DUŠAN ZBAVITEL, Prague 1954.

⁴⁰¹ In English by SACHINDRALAL GHOSH, New Delhi 1968; in Czech by DUŠAN ZBAVITEL, Prague 1964.

⁴⁰² NABANEETA DEV SEN, *Two Cases of Conscience and Alienation*. Jadavpur Journal of Comparative Literature 11, 1973, p. 107.

forces dominating his life and the old society. It is a hard fight with ever new clashes and defeats, depicted in the book as never before in Indian literature. Māṇik Bandyopādhyāy put much of himself into its hero, the village doctor Śaśī who obstinately tries to find a way out of the blind alley of antiquated customs and social superstitions.

Māṇik worked in Calcutta as a writer, editor and politician. In the forties, he joined the Indian Progressive Writers Association and turned definitely towards Marxism. He was a prolific author and the best production of the second phase of his career is short stories⁴⁰³ of which he wrote almost two hundred. Their themes are marked with political consciousness and their treatment is realistic. Hardships of the years of war, famine, the farmers' fight against oppression, Hindu-Muslim riots and, later on, the life of the working people and the lower middle class in Calcutta—these are the main subjects of his stories, collected in numerous books, e.g. *Prāgaitihāsik* (Prehistorical, 1937), *Ahiṃsā* (Non-Violence, 1941), *Catuṣkoṇ* (Four-Squared, 1942), *Ājkāl paśūr galpa* (Stories of Today, Yesterday and the Day Before, 1946), *Pheriwālā* (The Hawker, 1953), etc. His novels from this period, however, are lacking in the persuasiveness of the *Padmā nadir mājhi* and the *Putulnācer itikathā*.

Very different was the ideological and artistic development of Tārāsaṅkar Bandyopādhyāy (1898–1971) who also started with village novels.⁴⁰⁴ Among them, especially noteworthy and widely acclaimed were the *Dhātṛī debatā* (The Nursing Deity, 1939), the *Kālindī* (1940) and the *Hāṃsuli bāṅker upakathā* (The Legend of the Hāṃsuli Bend, 1947). They were inspired by the village life in Birbhum where the author was born and they reflected it in a realistic way, with a deep insight into its problems. Tārāsaṅkar was always active in politics, in the pre-War times he was jailed for his participation in the anti-British movement and after Independence he became an ardent supporter of the Government and a professional politician. His writings from this period, however, were less successful, except a few short stories which had interesting plots and revealed the author's ability in drawing lively characters.

Much younger in age was Nārāyaṇ Gaṅgopādhyāy (1918–1970) who entered Bengali literature with remarkable short stories mostly drawn from a rural environment; they were marked by uncompromising criticism of superstitions and backwardness, and of the repressive policy of the British colonial authorities. After Independence, Nārāyaṇ turned more to city life for his themes. The basic tone of his best books was deep humanism and a sharp sense of justice. They show the author's passionate concern for human suffering and the vain struggle to resist unbearable conditions and pressures. Among his themes, the tragedies caused by the partition of Bengal and the hardships of the refugees

⁴⁰³ In English, *Primeval and Other Stories*, ed. by DEBIPRASAD CHATTERJI, New Delhi 1958.

⁴⁰⁴ In English, his *Ganadevata* (The People Pavillion) appeared, translated by LILA RAY, Bombay 1969.

from East Pakistan occupied a prominent place. He wrote dozens of novels (Upanibeś, The Colony, 1943; Nil diganta, Blue Horizons, 1958; Megher upar prāsād,⁴⁰⁵ Castles Above the Clouds, 1963; etc.) and many short stories⁴⁰⁶ collected in several volumes. As a Reader in Bengali Literature at the University of Calcutta, he was also an ardent student of the history of literature.

Among other prose writers whose life's work has been already concluded, mention must be made of Rājśekhara Basu (1880–1960) who was a prominent philologist and translated the Mahābhārata, the Rāmāyaṇa, the Hitopadeśa and Kālidāsa's Meghadūta into Bengali prose. He won his popularity, however, first of all with his humorous and satirical stories published under the pen-name of Paraśurām. His humour was mostly kind and unhurting and revealed both his mastery of the Bengali language and his ability to sketch, with a few touches of pen, very vivid characters.

The late poets Sudhīndranāth Datta and Buddhadeb Basu have left a distinctive trail in Bengali poetry and have been followed by many younger poets.

Sudhīndranāth Datta (1901–1960),⁴⁰⁷ “an aristocrat by birth and by choice,”⁴⁰⁸ was, though much younger in age, rather close to Rabīndranāth Thākura whom he also accompanied during some of his journeys. In his poetry, however, he intentionally differed from him. As stated by Harīndranāth Datta,⁴⁰⁹ Sudhīndranāth founded the literary magazine Paricay, in 1931, because he was unable to gain access to other journals. He was an atheist and materialist, but also a romantic at the same time. His poetry was subjective and strove after a refined expression, often coining new words and unworn combinations of words, in an effort to avoid poetic clichés of the old school. He did not publish much, his best collections being the Orchestra (1935), the Saṃbarta (Cataclysmic Clouds, 1953) and the Kalāy o kālpuṣa (The Abode and Orion, 1957).

Buddhadeb Basu (1908–1974) appeared on the Bengali literary stage as the co-editor of the Dacca magazine Pragati (Progress), but even more important was the quarterly Kabitā (Poems) which he started in 1935. He published in it not only his own verse and poems by other, especially younger poets, but also his theoretical articles, polemics and reviews marked by a broad knowledge of the world literature and a rhetoric brilliance. He was a noted theoretician and professor of comparative literature, both at Jadavpur University in Calcutta and in the U.S.A. Buddhadeb left no literary genre and form untried and excelled in poetry, short story, novel, drama and essay. First of all, however, he was a poet imbued with a rich imagination and a sure verse technique, often echoing foreign models. The Kaṅkābatī (1937) and the Damayantī (1943) are

⁴⁰⁵ Translated into Czech by DUŠAN ZHAVITEL, Prague 1967.

⁴⁰⁶ An anthology appeared in Russian, translated by B. KARPUSHKIN, Moscow 1958.

⁴⁰⁷ In English, The World of Twilight, Calcutta 1970.

⁴⁰⁸ CLINTON B. SEELY in Dictionary of Oriental Literature, 2, London 1974, p. 43.

⁴⁰⁹ Uttarsurī IX, 1962, No. 4, pp. 473–7.

probably his best verse collections. His drama *Tapasī o Taraṅginī* won the Sahitya Akademi Award, in 1967. Numerous are also his short stories (*Rekhā-citra*, Pictures in Outline, 1931; *Erā orā ebam āro aneke*, These, Those and Many Others, 1932; *Pheriwālā*, The Hawker, 1940; etc.), often lyrical in mood and psychological in aim, undoubtedly better than his no less numerous novels.

For almost fifty years, Premendra Mitra (b. 1904) has been one of the most popular and widely read Bengali authors of both verse and prose; and it is difficult to say which of these two genres suits him better. In the thirties and the forties, he was associated with several literary journals and later worked for film and radio. From the very beginning, his writings have been marked by sensitivity and a keen sense of every injustice caused by the wrongs in society; his short stories are therefore often gloomy pictures, especially as they concentrate upon the lower strata of the Indian community. His verse has gradually gained thoughtfulness and philosophical depth, without, however, striving after any complicated philosophy of life; his diction is rather simple, when compared with that of his more modernistic contemporaries. As is the case with so many Bengali writers, Premendra is better in short stories than novels. One of his later creations is the charming character of the Bengali *Münchhausen* called *Ghanādā* whose amusing "lies" sometimes border on science-fiction (*Ghanādār galpa*, *Ghanādā's Stories*, 1967, etc.). Premendra's main collections of verse are *Prathamā* (The First, 1932), *Samrāt* (The Emperor, 1940), *Pherārī phauj* (The Deserters, 1948) and *Sāgar theke pherā* (Return from the Sea, 1956; Sahitya Akademi Award). Among his numerous novels and books of stories, the *Pañcāśar* (Five Arrows, 1929), *Benāmī bandar* (The Nameless Port, 1930) and *Kuyāśā* (Mist, 1938) should be mentioned.

The most outstanding representative of contemporary Bengali poetry is undoubtedly *Biṣṇu De* (b. 1909), a professor of English by profession and very well acquainted not only with the literary traditions of his country, but also with world literature at large, including that of ancient Greece and Rome. He is a Marxist, but his verse is the very opposite of the proclamatory and slogan-like poetry often found among the leftists. It is sophisticated, hard to understand and full of allusions to rather distant spheres and fascinates by the perfection of its metrical form and intricate imagery.

No more speech off stage in this poetic play,
The herald comes back sad from his frontline tour.
On Kailas ends the wanderlust of May.
Desires crystallise and I come home once more,
Calm from the adolescent lone tirade.
Elective mind tires of the luxuries of Truth,
The nomad finds in his *laissez-faire* trade
His ego's limits, my skylarking youth!
Great Mother! prodigal I now reclaim
My corner in your many-mansioned house.
Strange generations crowd there, yet in the same

Eternal feature shining in your face
 I recover my past, recast my future days —
 The firebrand bursts into a hymn of praise.⁴¹⁰

In the Bibliography of Bishnu De's books by Arun Sen⁴¹¹ thirteen volumes of poetry are listed, from the *Urbaśi o Ārtemis* (*Urvaśi and Artemis*, 1933) to the *Sambād mūlata kābya* (*News are in Essence Poetry*, 1969). Among them, the *Smṛti sattā bhabīṣyat* (*Remembrance, Reality, the Future*, 1963) was honoured by the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1965. Bishnu De is also the author of remarkable essays and literary reflections, e.g. *Sāhityer bhabīṣyat* (*The Future of Literature*, 1952).

The older generation of poets is also represented by Ajit Datta (1907), the author of simple and melodious poetry, and especially by Amiya Cakrabarti (1901) who has lived in the U.S.A. as a professor of philosophy. His long association with Rabindranāth Thākura, whose Secretary he was, naturally influenced his first poems (*Khasrā, Rough Draft*, 1938) but Amiya soon found his individual tone based on his experience as a keen and sensitive observer of life (*Pārāpār, On Opposite Shores*, 1953; *Pālābadal, Change of Time*, 1955, etc.).

About the end of the thirties a whole group of mostly leftist poets came into prominence attracting much attention by their clear political attitude and poetic talent. Dhanañjay Dās⁴¹² enumerates as their characteristic qualities, "historicity, intense human emotions, hope instead of hopelessness, sharp ridicule of exhaustion and ugliness, self-criticism, social consciousness instead of relying on pure thinking, willingness to accept domestic traditions," etc. They were reacting strongly and immediately to all rapid turns in the political and social development during the forties and did not lose their close contact with the political and social reality later on, after Independence. Samar Sen (b. 1916)⁴¹³ was the oldest of them and the first to start the "movement," in 1937, by his collection *Kayekṭi kabitā* (*A Few Poems*). His verse was intentionally as "un-poetic" as possible and it strongly influenced many other poets. Samar Sen himself, however, after his *Tinpuruṣ* (*Three Generations*, 1944) ceased to write poetry altogether.

Mañindra Rāy (b. 1919) published his *Ekcaṣu* (*One-eyed*) in 1939 and since then has added more than ten further collections, among which the *Mohini āṣāl* (1967, *Bewitching Veil*, in English, 1968) was honoured with the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1969. He is a Marxist and the changes in Indian life he is reacting to find a sublimated echo in his verse, filtered through his sensitive mind. His diction and style are clear and chaste and never verbose.

⁴¹⁰ Translated by the poet himself. *Kabitā*, 1960, No. 100, p. 91. See also *Water my roots*, essays by and on BISHNU DEY edited by DASGUPTA SAMIR, Calcutta 1973.

⁴¹¹ *Paricay* 38, 1969, No. 12, pp. 1265–89. See also DASGUPTA SAMIR (editor), *Watering roots*, essays by and on Bishnu Dey, Calcutta 1973.

⁴¹² *Paricay* 39, 1969, No. 1, p. 93.

⁴¹³ *The Complete Poems* by Samar Sen, translated by P. NANDY, Calcutta 1970.

The most talented member of this group is Subhāṣ Mukhopādhyāy (b. 1919)⁴¹⁴ who has always taken active part in political life and was imprisoned because of this activity. He is a militant type of poet, especially in his initial volumes; the first of them, the *Padātik* (Foot-soldier), appeared in 1940. Subhāṣ is a consistent Marxist, always striving after unambiguous expression and not avoiding even the most profane subjects. His poetry is strong and effective in its directness and sincerity. A new dimension is being added in his more recent books, such as *Yata dūrei yāi* (As Far As I Wander, 1962), *Kāl madhumās* (Tomorrow Comes Spring, 1966) or *Ei bhāi* (This Brother, 1970)—that of deeper contemplation on man and his relations to things and people, always in a close social context. The poet wrote also successful prose-works.

Very high is the number of younger poets—surprisingly high for anybody who is not acquainted with the rich tradition and the literally immense popularity of poetry in Bengal. The latter may at least be inferred from the fact that there exists a weekly devoted entirely to poetry, the *Sāptāhik Bāṅglā kabitā* (Bengali Poems Weekly, edited by Śakti Caṭṭopādhyāy), and there were attempts at publishing a daily of the same type (*Dainik kabitā*) and even, as an experiment, a similar “hourly” (*Kabitā ghaṇṭiki*). It is, of course, impossible to enumerate dozens of poets who would deserve mention, but let us, at least, notice some of them, such as *Kiraṇśaṅkar Sengupta* (1918), *Anil Cakrabartī* (1919), *Maṅgalācaraṇ Caṭṭopādhyāy* (1920), *Birendra Caṭṭopādhyāy* (1920), *Nareś Guha* (1921), *Nirendranāth Cakrabartī* (1924), *Jagannāth Cakrabartī* (1924), *Rām Basu* (1925), *Aruṇ Bhaṭṭācārya* (1925), *Śakti Caṭṭopādhyāy* (1933), *Alokraṇjan Dāśgupta* (1933), *Sunil Gaṅgopādhyāy* (1934) and *Śānti Lāhiṛī* (1936).

As stated above, in Bengali prose fiction the short story distinctly prevails in quality over the novel. Among its present representatives, many older writers continue to contribute to the varied spectrum, such as *Bibhūtibhūṣaṇ Mukhopādhyāy* (1896), *Prabodhkumār Sanyāl* (1907), the author of several novels and travelogues, and *Subodh Ghoṣ* (1908) whose book of short stories *Phasil* (Fossil) attracted much attention in the pre-Independence days. Both poems and prose sketches are written by *Sajanikānta Dās* (1900). Rich is the literary crop of *Annadāśaṅkar Rāy* (1904), a distinguished poet, but first of all prose writer and author of several volumes of short stories, novels, essays and travelogues; his *Satyāsatya* (Truth and Untruth, 1932–42) is a cycle of six novels forming a large social canvas.

An exceptional personality among these Bengali writers is *Balāicānd Mukhopādhyāy* (1899) who publishes under the pen-name of *Banaphul*. A medical practitioner by profession, he started as a poet, but soon found his true medium of expression in prose. He has written several plays and novels, e.g. the *Trṅkhaṇḍa* (A Bit of Straw, 1935) and the three-volume *Jaṅgam* (On the Move,

⁴¹⁴ Selected Poems of Subhas Mukhopadhyay, translated by P. Nandy et al., Calcutta 1969.

1943), but his most valuable contribution to modern Bengali literature is a number of very brief, terse stories, usually with a well-rounded plot (e.g. *Banaphuler galpa*, *Banaphul's Stories*, 1936; *Bhūyodarsan*, *Experiment*, 1942, etc.). Very effective is usually the point of each story. They are primarily concerned with the heroes' inner conflicts and the impact of their environment, not infrequently also attacking social prejudices and human vices. Sometimes they are near to caricature, but the author's deeply humanist mood always prevails. As a doctor practising in the countryside of West Bengal, Banaphul has discovered a rich source of experience and inspiration there which he knows how to make use of in his writings.

Manoj Basu (1901), originally a lawyer and a noted publisher, is well known for his popular novels (*Bhuli nāi*, *I Have Not Forgotten*, 1943; *Jaljāngal*, *The Water-jungle*, 1951, etc.) and short stories with a characteristic mixture of romantic and realistic elements. Gopāl Hāldār (1902), known as an active Communist politician, a Marxist literary critic and historian⁴¹⁵ and an intellectual leader of the leftists, wrote a few novels dealing with the liberation movement and imbued with an acute historical sense (the trilogy: *Ekadā*, *Once*, 1939; *Anyadīn*, *Another Time*, 1950; *Ār ekdin*, *Yet Another Day*, 1954).

Bimal Mitra (1912) is perhaps the most popular Bengali short story writer of today. He entered literature rather late, in 1945, with his collection of stories, *Diner par din* (*Day After Day*) but has since written almost two hundred stories (*Rāṇī sāhebā*, *Mrs. Rāṇī*, 1954; *Putul didi*, 1954, etc.) and some good novels of which *Sāheb Bibi Golām* (1953) won much popularity.

Among the younger writers, Samareś Basu (1923) must be named first. He succeeded Māṇik Bandyopādhyāy both as the most outstanding representative of the leftist wing in fiction and as a prolific author of excellent short stories and no less successful novels. Some of the earlier ones, such as the *Gaṅgā* (1957) deal with the village life, but in most cases, Samareś Basu is the author of city novels and stories from the milieu of the lower and middle classes, full of imagination in inventing interesting plots, very skilful in their realistic treatment and bold in sexual matters; one of his novels, *Bibar* (*Cave*) was even proscribed for obscenity. Numerous are both his novels, e.g. *Uttaraṅga* (*Waves*, 1951), *Bi Ṭi roḍer dhāre* (*On the B. T. Road*, 1953) etc. and collections of short stories, e.g. *Akāl bṛṣṭi* (*Untimely Rains*, 1954), *Paśārinī* (*She-Hawker*, 1955), *Joyār bhāṭā* (*Flood-tide*, 1960), etc. He also used the pen-name Kālkut in some of his novels, e.g. *Amṛtakumbher sandhāne* (*Searching for Nectar*, 1954).

There are many other promising talents among younger Bengali writers, some of whom, for instance Śaṅkar (full name Maṇiśaṅkar Bandyopādhyāy)⁴¹⁶ and Sunil Gaṅgopādhyāy, have already proved their novelistic and story-telling abilities.

⁴¹⁵ Cf. e.g. his *Bāṅgālā sāhityer rūprekhā* (*Basic Features of Bengali Literature*), Calcutta 1958.

⁴¹⁶ RACHEL VAN M. BAUMER, *Sankar: Twentieth-Century Kathak. Books Abroad*, Autumn 1969, Norman, pp. 487-498.

"... a first-rate dramatist is yet to be born in Bengal. The drama we have had to the present day hardly deserves the name, so primitive is the sense of action, character, and dialogue," says J. C. Ghosh.⁴¹⁷ However harsh these words may sound, they are not fully unjustified. The drama still remains the weakest point of modern Bengali literature. Nevertheless, a few gifted playwrights do deserve attention.

Sacindranāth Sengupta (1891–1964) was a journalist active in politics and his numerous plays were progressive in outlook and well-conceived in the development of dramatic characters. The *Sirājuddaulā* (1938) is a historical play and the *Samgrām o śānti* (War and Peace, 1940), *Ei svādhinatā* (This Freedom, 1948), *Sabār upare mānuṣ satya* (Man is the Greatest Truth, 1959) etc. are social and political dramas.

One of the Nestors of the contemporary Bengali playwrights, Manmath Rāy (1899) wrote a number of plays commemorating India's liberation movement, e.g. the *Muktir dāk* (Call of Freedom, 1924), the *Kārāgār* (Jail, 1930) etc. His more recent dramas (e.g. *Lāṅgal*, Plough, 1955) and excellent one-act plays (*Naba ekāṅka*, New One-Act Plays, 1958) are either social or psychological in contents and approach.

Pramathanāth Biśī (1902) is a versatile author who has applied himself to writing poetry (*Akuntalā*, 1946; *Uttar megh*, The Upper Cloud, 1953, etc.), novels (*Joṛādighīr Caudhurī paribār*, The Caudhurī Family of Joṛādighī, 1937) and short stories (*Brahmār hāsi*, The Laugh of Brahma, 1948; *Alaukik*, Supernatural, 1957, etc.), not to speak of literary history and criticism. His most individual contributions, however, are his dramas imbued with a rare sense of humour and staged rather often, e.g. *Rṇam kṛtvā* (If you Borrow, 1935), *Ghṛtaṃ pibet* (He Should Drink Ghee, 1936), *Maucāke dḥil* (Into a Wasps' Nest, 1948), etc.

Digindracandra Bandyopādhyāy (1910) is a journalist by profession and a Marxist in his political views. This is reflected in his numerous dramas and one-act plays dealing mostly with political problems and social questions, e.g. the difficulties of life of the refugees from Pakistan, the hardship of the lower-class families, etc. The *Antarāl* (Interval, 1945), *Taraṅga* (Waves, 1947), *Bāstuhitā* (The Ancestor Home, 1948) and many other dramas react to the most pertinent questions of the day.

Before turning our attention to the contemporary literature of Bangladesh, we would once again stress the immensely important role played by various journals and magazines in the cultural life of West Bengal. They are very many in number, and surprisingly many to specialize in literature. Each of them brings out, at the autumn festival of *Durgāpūjā*, a much enlarged special issue (the so-called *śārādīya samkhyā*) with dozens of poems, short stories and even whole novels which, in their entirety, give a true picture of the gradual development of literature in West Bengal.

⁴¹⁷ J. C. Ghosh, BL, p. 151.

In East Bengal, nowadays Bangladesh, the literary situation was much different, after the gain of Independence and Partition (1947). Though prevailing in number, the Muslim part of the Bengali nation had much less intellectuals than the Hindu community. Several causes had brought about this phenomenon, among which the generally worse economic position of Muslims in the undivided India must be stressed, which made their access to higher education much more difficult. First of all, however, there are historical reasons. The Bengali Muslim community did not take part in the modernization movement of the 19th century and was not able to catch up with the rapid development of modern culture in the 20th. Moreover, before Partition, the majority of higher posts and intellectual positions even in East Bengal were occupied by the Hindus, and almost all Hindu writers, poets, journalists and professors had to leave the country about 1947, leaving behind a cultural vacuum which the Muslims were not able to fill up immediately. All these factors considerably retarded the growth of literature in Bangladesh which had to wait till the new generation of poets and writers grew in number and experience. No wonder that their literature was much different, in many a respect, from its sister literature in West Bengal. Also the fact that connections between both countries were intentionally and consistently prevented by the Pakistani authorities played a role here. And finally, the undue stress put on religion, i.e. Islam, from above was another negative factor in the development of a true modern literature in East Bengal.

In general, two tendencies were discernible among Eastern Bengali writers and poets, from the very beginning. Some of them turned towards Islam, refusing the common traditions of the undivided Bengal and striving after the revival of Islamic traditions of both Arabic-Persian and Bengali origin. Also in their diction, they preferred Persian and Urdu vocabulary, purifying their language of many Sanskritic elements. In contents, they often revived Islamic subjects and stressed the religious basis of the new Eastern Bengali culture. Tālim Hosen (1918) and Farrukh Āhmad (1919–74), the author of the *Sāt sāgarer mājhi* (The Sailor of Seven Seas, 1945), Muhūrter kabitā (The Poems of the Moment), Hātem Tāi (1966) and many other collections, were the main representatives of these tendencies.

Much larger in number, however, were those poets and writers who understood the necessity of a secular basis for their writings, and either continued the pre-Partition traditions (Rabīndranāth Ṭhākur being the main influence), or looked for a quite new way of building up their national literature. Among the older authors, the poetess Begam Sufiyā Kāmāl (1911) excelled as the author of love and nature poetry; her *Sāmjher mājā* (Twilight Magic) appeared in 1938, continued, after Independence, by other collections, e.g. *Man o jīban* (Mind and Life, 1960), *Mājā kājal* (Magic Collyrium, 1951), etc. Also Golām Mostāfā (1897–1964) was at his best when writing love poetry, sincere in conception and simple in diction; much of it was collected in the *Bulbulistān* (The Land of the Nightingale, 1949). Mention must be made also of Ābdul

Kādir (1906) and Ābul Hosen (1921) whose *Nababasanta* (The New Spring) appeared in 1942.

Very different was the approach chosen by the greatest poet of Bangladesh who was the only Eastern Bengali author able to gain general recognition in the whole of Bengal and to reach also foreign readers by his poetry. It is Jasimuddīn (1903–76) who, when still studying at the College in Faridpur, attracted much attention by his poem *Kabar* (The Grave) published in a Calcutta journal and later included in the poet's first book of verse, the *Rākḥālī* (Pastoral, 1929); the poem is a lament of an old poor farmer over the grave of his grandson. It was this poem already which indicated the main source of Jasimuddīn's inspiration, the immensely rich folk poetry of East Bengal which he had been collecting ever since his youth and was also echoing in his own books: *Raṅgīlā nāyer mājhi* (Boatman of the Colourful Boat, 1933), *Padmā pār* (The Banks of Padma, 1949) and especially in his most famous ballads, *Naksī-kāmthār māṭh* (Field of the Embroidered Quilt, 1929),⁴¹⁸ *Sojan Bādiyār ghāṭ* (The Wharf of Sojan the Gypsy, 1933)⁴¹⁹ and *Sakinā* (1960). All of them are modern counterparts of old folk ballads, narrating love stories of simple villagers in a highly emotional tone and using metaphors either directly taken over from folk songs or created in imitation of them. Jasimuddīn wrote also several books of lyrical poetry, with a deep understanding of the needs of villagers, e.g. *Bālucar* (Sandbanks, 1930), *Dhānkhet* (The Paddy Field, 1932), *Māṭir kānnā*⁴²⁰ (The Earth's Cry, 1951) and *Halud barānī* (The Turmeric-coloured, 1966). His *Bhayābaha sei dingulite* (During Those Horrible Days, 1972) was inspired by the fight for the independence of Bangladesh. Also his plays, *Beder meye* (The Gipsy Girl, 1951), *Madhumālā* (1956) and *Pallī badhu* (Village Bride, 1956) are re-elaborations of folk ballads and fairy tales, and his *Bāṅgālār hāsir galpa* (Humorous Tales of Bengal, 2 vols., 1961–64) re-countings of folk anecdotes. His only novel, *Bobā kāhini* (The Dumb Tale, 1961) is autobiographical in contents and very interesting for its realistic depiction of village life in East Bengal, at the beginning of the century.

Jasimuddīn's poetry, often translated into foreign languages, is quite singular in its orientation to the folk traditions of Bengal. Many of the poet's songs have become true folk songs, returning to the rich store which they were inspired by. Kabi Jasimuddīn has thus richly repaid his source of inspiration and his poetry enjoys unrivalled popularity among the broad masses of Bangladesh.

The majority of contemporary poets of Bangladesh, mostly younger in age, belong to the generation which started writing in the post-Partition days, to give expression to the aspirations of the youth, but also to its disillusion and growing discontent with the unhappy development of Pakistan, during

⁴¹⁸ In English by E. M. MILFORD, Calcutta 1939.

⁴¹⁹ In English by BARBARA PAINTER and YANN LOVELOCK, London 1969.

⁴²⁰ Translated into Russian by S. SEVERTSEV, Moscow 1959.

whose rule they had to fight even for such basic rights as the right to use and to cultivate their mother tongue.⁴²¹ Āhsān Habīb (1917), the author of the *Rātri šeṣ* (The Night is Over, 1947) and the *Chāyā hariṇ* (The Shadow Deer, 1962), Sikāndār Ābu Jāfar (1918), the author of the *Kabitā* (Poems, 1965), Saiyad Āli Āhsān (1922),⁴²² the author of the *Anek ākāś* (Many Skies, 1967), Sānāul Hak (1923) whose first book was *Nadī o mānuṣer kabitā* (Poems of River and Man, 1957) and who wrote also the *Sūrya anyatar* (The Sun is the Other) and the *Sambhabā anyanā* (The Possibility is the Same, 1965), Saiyad Āli Āsrāf (1924), Ābdul Gaṇi Hājārī (1925), Āsrāf Siddikī (1926), Ābdur Raṣīd Khān (1927), Mazhārul Islām (1927) whose *Māṭir phasal* (The Harvest of the Earth) appeared in 1955, Šāmsur Rahmān (1929) who started in 1960 with the collections *Pratham gān*, *dvitīya mṛtyur āge* (The First Song, Before the Second Death) and *Bṛṣṭijharā gān* (Songs of the Rainfall), followed by the *Raudra karōṭite* (In the Skull of Sunheat, 1963), Hāsān Hāfizur Rahmān (1932)—the title of his *Bimukh prāntar* (Adverse Land, 1965) is in accordance with Eliot's *Waste Land*—Āl Māhmud (1936), Fazāl Šāhābuddin (1936), Moham-mad Māhfuzullāh (1936) whose *Zulekhār man* (The Soul of Zuleikha) was published in 1969, Ābu Henā Mostafā Kāmāl (1936), the author of the *Āpan yauban bairī* (Youth, the Enemy, 1974), Ābul Hāsān (1948), the author of the *Rājā yāy rājā āse* (Kings Go, Kings Come, 1972)—all these and many other poets try to write modern and original poetry, sometimes with remarkable success.

In prose fiction, conditions were rather unfavourable in East Bengal; the low number of literates, considerably narrowing the book market, very few journals and magazines and, of course, absence of practically any experienced writers slowed down the production and progress not only of novels, but also of short stories. Nevertheless, several books have appeared which, even though sometimes artistically unripe, cannot be denied certain qualities—a sincere effort to treat the main problems of village people, to support all healthy elements within the traditional Muslim society and to criticize hindrances in its development. In the best of these books, the didactic tendency is not too obvious to be detrimental to the handling of the story and is balanced by living characters and interesting plots.

Of this type is especially the novel *Lāl sālu* (The Red Salu-Tree, 1948)⁴²³ by Saiyad Wāliullāh (1922–1971) who, though studying in Calcutta and working in Dacca and Paris, as the Pakistani representative at the UNESCO, was returning in his novels, short stories and dramas to the village milieu which he knew intimately from his childhood. His novels *Cānder amābasyā*

⁴²¹ Especially in February 1952. Cf. *Ekusār saṅkalan*, published by the Bangla Akademi in Dacca, 1971.

⁴²² His Collected Poems (*Kābya-saṅgraha*) appeared in Dacca, 1974.

⁴²³ In English, under the title *Tree Without Roots*, London 1967. Translated into English by QUAISAR SAEED, ANNE-MARIE THIBAUD et al., London–Toronto 1967; into French by ANNE-MARIE THIBAUD, Paris 1963; into Czech by DUŠAN ZBAVITEL, Prague 1974.

(The New Moon, 1967) and Kāndo nadī kāndo (Weep, River, Weep, 1969) were awarded the Bāṃlā Akāḍemi (Bengal Academy) Prize in 1961 and his drama Bahipīr (The Saint) the Pen-Club Award. His best book, however, is his first novel mentioned above, with a well-conceived plot and excellent characters, narrating the story of a village priest who has based his career on a faked holy tomb.

A similar tendency marks the novel Sūryadīghal bāri (The Enchanted House, 1955)⁴²⁴ by Ābu Ishāk (b. 1926) directed against prejudices of the traditional Muslim society to women who, driven by poverty, have to appear in public ignoring the prescribed *pardah*. Jaygun, the heroine of the novel, is a simple village woman drawn in a persuading way without much psychologizing; she is a typical product of and victim to her milieu and its way of thinking. Ābu Ishāk wrote also several short stories collected, for instance, in Mahāpataṅga (Great Insect) and Hārem (Harem, 1963).

Well written is the novel Bān (Flood, 1959) by Ābdur Raṣīd Wāsekpūrī (1933), against the background of one of those frequent natural catastrophes in the Bangladesh countryside; the author wrote also several short stories. In the latter genre, Śaokat Osmān (1921) has excelled as one of the most talented writers of Bangladesh; his stories as well as his dramas (Kāṃkarmaṇi, The Gravel Gem; Etimkhānā, Orphanage, etc.) are social in contents and humanistic in approach. Also Ālāuddīn Āl Āzād (1932), Ābdul Gāffār Caudhurī (1933), Saiyad Śāmsul Hak (1934), Śaokat Ālī (1935), Hāsān Āzizul Hak (1938) and many other younger authors have already several remarkable short story collections on their account. Among the representatives of the older generation, Ābul Fazal (1903), the author of the novel Rāṅgāprabhāt (The Red Morning) and especially of several excellent books of essays must be mentioned. As a promising novelist, Raṣīd Karīm (1934) is noteworthy, the author of the novels Uttampuruṣ (awarded the Adamji Prize in 1961) and Prasanna pāṣāṇ (The Kind Stone, 1963).

Several poets and writers have lost their lives during the fight for the freedom of Bangladesh, such as the two brothers and prose writers Śahīdullāh Kāysār (1931) and Śahir Rāyhān (1933), and the playwright and linguist, Munīr Caudhurī (1925).

Undoubtedly many other poets and writers of Bangladesh should be added, but lack of trustworthy materials and sources prevents us from enlarging the scope of this survey.⁴²⁵

Bengali literature, in Indian West Bengal as well as Bangladesh, is one of the most mature literatures of South Asia and will certainly continue to play an important role in the literary life of this part of the world.

⁴²⁴ Translated into Czech by DUŠAN ZBAVITEL, Prague 1962.

⁴²⁵ The author is indebted to Dr. M. S. QURESHI for many informations and dates concerning the contemporary literature of Bangladesh.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ArOr	Archiv orientální, Prague
BL	J. C. Ghosh, Bengali Literature. London 1948
BLNC	Sushil Kumar De, Bengali Literature in the Nineteenth Century. Calcutta, 2nd ed. 1962
BMI	Āśutoṣ Bhaṭṭācārya, Bāṃlā maṅgalkābyer itihās. Calcutta, 3rd. ed. 1958
BMS	M. Shahidullah, Buddhist Mystic Songs. Āscarca-caryācārya (Oldest Bengali and Other Eastern Vernaculars from 700 to 1100 A.D.). The Dacca University Studies, Vol. 4, No. 2, January 1940
BSI	Asitkumār Bandyopādhyāy, Bāṃlā sāhityer itibrtta. Calcutta, Vol. I, 1959; Vol. II, 1962; Vol. III, 1966; Vol. IV, 1973
BSR	Alokrañjan Dāśgupta and Debīprasād Bandyopādhyāy, Bāṃlā sāhityer rekhālekhyā. Calcutta 1969
CP	Atindra Mojumder, The Caryāpadas. Calcutta 1967
HBL	Sukumar Sen, History of Bengali Literature. New Delhi 1960
HBLL	Dinesh Chandra Sen, History of Bengali Language and Literature. Calcutta 1911
OBLT	Tarapada Mukherji, The Old Bengali Language and Text. Calcutta 1963
ORC	Shashibhushan Dasgupta, Obscure Religious Cults. Calcutta, 2nd ed. 1962
RJRP	Prabhātkumār Mukhopādhyāy, Rabindrajībani o Rabindrasāhitya-prabeśak. Calcutta, Vols. I–IV, 1953–56
RTPD	Edward Thompson, Rabindranath Tagore, Poet and Dramatist. London 1926
RTPW	Vincenc Lesný, Rabindranath Tagore, His Personality and Work. London 1939
USP	Asitkumār Bandyopādhyāy, Ūnabimśa śatābdīr prathamārdha o Bāṃlā sāhitya. Calcutta 1959

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